

SEPTEMBER, 1954

IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

SEPTEMBER, 1954

35¢

VENGEANCE
FROM THE PAST

by GEOFF ST. REYNARD



Introducing the

AUTHOR



★
Jerome Bixby
★

WAS born in Hollywood, January 11, 1923, at 3:48 A. M., began rolling slowly eastward, and fourteen years later found myself in New York City.

In the interim I'd had measles, whooping cough and mumps all at the same time; bit a dog and a policeman; outrun a tornado; flown a kite bearing a message to an angel (Lon Chaney's—and it came down without the message), and read a pulp magazine.

The magazine was Street & Smith's old *Wild West Weekly*, one half of whose total wordage every issue consisted of gunshots written out as "Crang-g-g-g!" Soon I graduated to *Doc Savage*, *Bill Barnes*, *Operator #5*, *G-8*, *The Spider*, ad nostalgia (collected, swapped, ran a store for the neigh-

borhood kids in my garage) . . . and at last to *Astounding*, because I wondered how the rocketships on the cover flew without wings. I immediately grew antennae, and haven't stopped reading science fiction since . . . and a year afterward, at thirteen, I sold my first story I ever wrote. To *Astounding*, you ask? Nope—to *Wild West Weekly*. Crang-g-g-g!

My first ironclad ambition was to be a concert pianist; was just beginning to shape up when somebody broke my fist with his jaw . . . that ended that. Turned to composition; was an early member of The New Chamber Music Society, and had some radio and recital performances of piano works. Dropped music for ten years then

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William L. Hamling
Editor

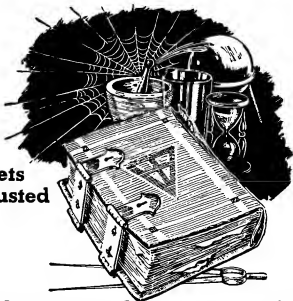
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The Editorial

BACK in 1947 in the pages of *Fantastic Adventures* we introduced a new character to readers of science fiction. A red-headed, mischievous female named TOFFEE. This gal was a dream-girl in the absolute sense of the word; but more than that she has since become the darling of all lovers of science-fantasy. Her creator, Charles F. Myers, has been acclaimed by many thousands of enthusiastic readers of the series as the new Thorne Smith! We heartily agree, and are more than happy to announce that IMAGINATION will proudly present a brand-new TOFFEE novel next month — THE LAUGHTER OF TOFFEE.

TO say that we've been keeping Charlie Myers busy at his typewriter would be the understatement of the year. We've got a whole batch of TOFFEE stories ready for Madge. And what's even more interesting is the advent of our brand new companion magazine, IMAGINATIVE TALES—now on sale at your favorite news-dealer—featuring in the first issue a complete book-length TOFFEE novel. And we might add that subsequent issues of IMAGINATIVE TALES will also feature TOFFEE stories. The sum and substance of all this is simply that you can count on being well supplied with plenty of TOFFEE adventures from now on!

FOR any readers of Madge who are not familiar with the TOFFEE series, but who have read and enjoyed the works of Thorne Smith, we can only say that you've got a real treat in store for you. The TOFFEE series are written in the true Thorne Smith tradition. And we might add that we think Charles F. Myers will take his place beside the late master as a genius of the hilarious science-fantasy story. So watch for the October issue of Madge on sale August 31st. And in the meantime run to your newsstand and get the first issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES. You won't be sorry! wh



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Ray Rollins fought to preserve the Space Station — and Earth — from an enemy mankind had forgotten. An enemy in hiding, awaiting its —

Vengeance From The Past!

By

Geoff St. Reynard

IT STARTED during the program. The little noises were there but I didn't pay any attention to them, and I don't know now whether I thought they were the wind and the rain or maybe some realistic sound effects on tv. Of course they were the small sounds made by the two things that wanted to get into my house. They tried the doors, turning the knobs and pressing their bodies against the panels, and then they prowled around testing the windows. They were as silent as cobras but windows pushed or doors shoved will make some noise and so the little creaks were there but I paid no attention to them.

Then I got the feeling that someone was looking at me.

Nuts. My background as a fiction writer was getting under my skin. Someone watching me, my

God, from where? The French windows behind me? Who'd be out in this downpour? I was glad my wife Nessa was asleep upstairs. With a baby on the way she needed her rest. Just to ease my rippling spine, I'd give a quick glance over my shoulder.

I did.

I saw a face like a gigantic mask. Enormous skull, low brow, small chin and thick-lipped mouth; wide cheeks and a mass of tumbled gray hair crowning the hatless head. Suggestion of a body like a gorilla's clad in dark broadcloth. Hands pressed flat on the glass, short thumbs and long fingers thick as country sausages. Worst of all the ghastly thing, two thinned eyes that caught the light of the tv lamp and shot it back at me as glowing crimson oblongs of animal hate. This creature, standing rock-steady



beyond the full-length windows that were streamed and blurry with the driving rain, this beast, this—

I closed my eyes tight and then opened them. It was gone into the rain, an optical illusion! It had really spooked me there for an instant, the old marrow was still cold from the first grisly shock.

I turned and started watching the set again. I started to chuckle to myself. I heard the French windows snap and groan a little with the wind. Then I heard the fretful sound of a strained and snapping bolt. *That* wasn't the wind! I jumped to my feet and whirled around. I froze where I stood. A hulking brute with a mask for a face was coming for me and then I saw the face was a face and not a mask at all.

Another man behind the horror said sharply, "Don't touch him, Old One!" and those paws with the sausage fingers fell reluctantly. I backed up two steps and the tv set held me from going any further. The second intruder passed the horror and thrust out his hand, which was about as big as a hand can be without becoming an outsize foot; it took me a moment to realize that he meant me to shake it. When I didn't move, he grinned and said in his deep voice, "Don't know me, Ray?" and then I did know him. I was happier not re-

membering him, I wished I could stop knowing who he was, but now I did and I knew I was likely going to be dead before sunup, because he was Bill Cuff.

I did shake hands with him. I'm five-feet-ten and weigh one-sixty and I'm about as rugged as the average guy, or more so, because I play handball and used to be a pro footballer before I got married; but if I'd angered Bill Cuff he might have picked me up and torn me into little scraps like a piece of bond paper. He was the strongest man I ever knew. And for a couple of years he'd been badly wanted by the police, because he had murdered at least a dozen people. I shook hands with him. I didn't like it but I wasn't going to ponder to my preferences just then.

"Sit down, Ray," Bill said, as if it had been his house. "Sit down, Old One." This to his companion.

The thing with the face sat on the floor, folding down without effort till his hams rested on his heels. I sat on the couch. Bill Cuff walked up and down the room. He kept his voice pitched low as he talked and I knew that Nessa wouldn't hear a thing if she happened to be awake. I watched Cuff. He moved back and forth like a great panther brooding in its cage and planning an escape. There was something so easy in

those movements of leg and body that the effect wasn't altogether human. Which wasn't surprising, in view of what he proceeded to tell me . . .

CHAPTER II

“YOU remember, Ray, the week I disappeared? You remember how I killed the two museum guards and the three cops, and afterwards the eight or ten searchers who were pursuing me through the swamp? It made headlines all over this country and the rest of the world too. Jack the Ripper had a grandson. Bill Cuff the mad berserker was unleashed on the world, breaking men's backs and twisting their heads in a nightmare of murder. Where would he strike next?

“And then I didn't strike, and they said I must be dead, drowned in the swamplands.

“I wasn't dead: obviously. I'd been discovered by a muster of the Old Companions, and was living in their HQ, an ancient wooden house in the center of the swamps. I was learning the history of my race, and the plans that it had for its future.

“My race, yes . . .

“Ray we are the Neanderthals . . .”

I didn't laugh at him, hearing Bill Cuff say that so soberly. I

couldn't. Not with the *thing* sitting on the floor watching me; the thing that had stepped right out of a museum reconstruction of the Stone Age! Cuff went on talking.

“My memories came at me in a flood, remembrances of the dawn of time. I fled in retrospect from the encroachments of Man, he who was a little like me but so vastly different; Man who gradually, painstakingly wiped out my breed. Or so he thought. He forgot the matings, the myriad couplings of Neanderthal bucks with human women. He forgot that dark blood runs stronger than light, that the bestial is stronger than the civilized, that a drop of wolf-blood will often make a dog a ravening brute, that one small dilution of Neanderthal carries down through years and centuries to crop up again, full-fledged and vigorous, time after time in an otherwise placid strain.

“The Neanderthal died, but his seed was carried in the bodies of Homo sapiens, and after a period cropped out in violent flowering as the Pict. Luck brought out the great strain in force, and banding together in the isles, we were a race apart once more. Then time conquered us a second season; the Picts were vanquished and their pitiful remnants bred once more

into the watery outlander life-form, that of Man.

"Then in later ages we discovered ourselves as different, but never could make of ourselves a dominant race: so we were hunted in ones and twos, and when our ancient blood cried for vengeance on Man, we slew him and died alone. We were the so-called werewolves and the vampires, the ghouls, the ogres, the incubi and succubi, the Good Folk and changelings and devils of the woods. We who always fought Man, unknowing what we were or why we fought, we formed the basis of every legend that told of horrible alien things lying in wait beside every path and in every fen and bog and desolate place.

"In the eighteenth century we were the raging madmen of Bedlam.

"Late in the nineteenth, science unwittingly came to our aid. The Neanderthal man emerged from dry bones as a beast, a manlike animal who had fallen to make way for *Homo sapiens*. And gradually those of us who had the dawn brain, the remembrance of glories far past, realized that we were not mad, but poor deluded men who thought ourselves different — *we were* different. We were the descendants and inheritors of the Neanderthal, he who came before

man and was in many ways better, stronger, more savagely intelligent and possessed of much higher capabilities. We were not men, and the time was coming when we would no longer need to masquerade as men. We were coming into our inheritance!"

Bill Cuff halted in front of me and his face, broad, heavy-boned, topped with thick black hair and carrying an expression of cruel and truculent power, now lit up with malignant glee. I felt a cold chill.

"And all this I remembered in a space of two days!

"What I remembered best was the hate.

"We hated you—oh, God, how we hated! Imagine the hate you'd feel toward a race from Mars that came and overran your planet and stamped out your folk till only a pitiful handful were left. Man had come and usurped *our* earth, hadn't he? So the blood remembered, and hated."

Bill Cuff laughed suddenly.

"Ray, I'm not mad, as you were just thinking. I offer you that as proof: we are to a degree telepathic. All of us. Yet *men* are not.

"It's true. *We are the Neanderthals. We are not human. And we have returned to take back our inheritance, which is the world!*"

CHAPTER III

HE allowed me to sit without speaking for the space of about ten minutes. I needed that time. I had to go all over what he'd said, consider each statement, try to forget that it sounded like fantasy, try to realize that Bill Cuff and Lord knew how many others of the so-called Old Companions believed this yarn with their whole energies. I had to take the tale and consider it in its entirety, as a broad concept which might be true, and then I had to grit my teeth and look at the significance of it as if by some incredible, wild chance it *were* true . . .

The significance was horrible, of course, but it was doubly or rather trebly awful for me personally, because Bill Cuff was my cousin.

His father, who'd died before Bill was born, had been my mother's brother.

And the reason I say it was trebly bad for me was that upstairs my wife Nessa lay asleep, and stirring in her was our child.

And if Bill Cuff was right, then that child and I myself came of a race that was only partly human; and neither of us could call ourselves by the proud title of Man.

At the end of ten minutes, the creature called Old One roused him-

self and gave a grunt. It seemed to be a two-syllable word, but of no language I ever knew.

Bill Cuff nodded and replied, "Yes he does, Old One," showing that it had actually conveyed meaning. I looked again at that ferocious mask, and I think I began believing Bill Cuff's story with an intelligent awareness of its truth, right then. Old One was a Neanderthal. Only a blind idiot could have doubted it.

"Now here's the reason I've come here to tell you this," began Bill Cuff, and I waved a hand to stop him.

"I know why," I said huskily. "We're cousins. You think the same blood may run in my veins."

"It does without a doubt. You see, I've checked on my mother, who's still living; and she isn't a carrier. So it was my father—your uncle. And you may not have the memory, Ray, but you have the blood. You're Neanderthal too."

"So you want me to come out to the swamps and join you?"

Bill Cuff flung himself onto the couch beside me, leaning near, breathing into my face. His breath smelled like raw meat, or maybe it was my imagination. He said, his voice a rumbling growl, "No, that isn't why I came. I want to find Howard. And I think you know where he is."

My belly contracted and my palms that were already damp became clammy.

I got up and paced the room nervously. My brain was clanking and buzzing in a kind of scrambled gear.

HOWARD Rollins was my brother. He was a scientist, a top-flight brain; serious where I'm flippant, keen where I'm fuzzy, and high-IQed where I'm sort of upper-middle-minded. He'd been working for the government since the establishment of Oak Ridge. Right at that moment he was on a small heavily forested scrap of land off the Maine coast, a bit of wind-swept earth called Odo Island. I knew what he was doing and it was as important as the atom bomb, or maybe even more so. I knew these things because Howard trusted me. I said to Bill Cuff, "He's on Pompey Island."

Cuff's gray eyes glinted. I noticed now that Old One's eyes were exactly the same color. "*Cachug*," said Cuff, or some damn fool grunt that sounded like it, and Old One got up and went out of the French windows into the wind and rain, lurching like a clothed gorilla. Then my cousin turned to me once more.

"We know what he's doing, Ray; but we couldn't find out where

he was doing it. We have Old Companions in the government, but none who were placed in your position, who'd know where Howard was despite the heavy curtain of secrecy. So I had to risk coming into the city to see you." He seemed to listen then, to sounds which I couldn't hear. He grinned. "Now," he said, "how soon can you wind up your affairs for, say, a week?"

"Right now," I said, almost without thinking. "I have six scripts completed —"

"Then you'll meet us in Boston tomorrow afternoon — five sharp beside the City Hall on School Street."

"Wait a minute," I protested. "What—"

"We'll explain everything then. Don't worry, Ray. You deal fairly with us and we'll deal more than fairly by you. If you're telling me the truth, if you play ball, you'll be the first member of the Old Companions accepted in spite of lack of dawn memory. A proud thing," he said, drawing himself up to his impressive full height, "a very proud thing, Ray." The flame of a fanatic shone in the gray eyes, and then he had turned and was gone and I was staring at the dead tv set and licking my lips that were dry as tomb-dust.

When I was sure they had both

gone, I crossed to the French windows and secured them with a chair, and then I went to the phone. I had to call the police right away, of course; I was believing the mad Neanderthal story, but I knew that the light of morning might force me to discredit it; nevertheless, Bill Cuff the multiple murderer had been here, and the cops would have to know. Thank God I'd given my cousin the wrong address for Howard! I picked up the phone and started to dial the police.

To this day I don't know why I racked the phone before I'd finished dialing. Some hunch, I don't know what it was. I stood there in the diffused radiance of the tv lamp, still trembling from my recent interview with that ripper and his apeman sidekick, and for a few minutes I didn't do anything but breathe heavily, and then I turned and raced up the stairs.

Not until I saw the empty bed, the blanket and sheet on the floor, the open window, not till then did I face the fact that Bill Cuff would never have left me without taking along a hostage.

Nessa was gone!

CHAPTER IV

I CAUGHT the seven a.m. train for Boston. I hadn't slept or even lain down all night. The sole

conclusion I'd come to was that I didn't dare ask for help in this job, not yet at any rate. I would be jeopardizing Nessa's life.

I had thought of the police. But they'd had two years to find Bill Cuff and failed. One hint that they were looking for him, and he with his crazy Old Companions would stamp out my wife's life as off-handedly as I'd squash a beetle. I'm a law-abiding citizen and I respect the enforcers of the law; but this was a special case. I'd done my civic duty other times, but now I was on a one-man crusade. I had to save Nessa. If I could chop down Cuff, well and good. But Nessa came first.

As the train shot along through countryside scattered with dying autumn foliage, swept with intermittent rains, I thought of my brother Howard and his work. On Odo Island he and six other top-grade brains were creating a space station for the United States—a man-made moon, the first jump to the stars — and equally important, a lookout post from which we could keep tabs on all of Earth.

A lot of the heavy forest on Odo was false; it couldn't be detected from the air, and the formation of the island prevented its being seen from the sea, but plenty of that green was only a big canopy shielding the small air field on which a

great wheel-shaped space station had already been put together. 237 feet across, it would in the near future be carried off the earth, towed by the enormous three-stage rockets which were already waiting in hiding along the eastern coast of the States. One thousand miles up — one thousand *plus* — it would then become a satellite of Terra.

Odo was guarded by its coast, a real rock-bound wreckers' paradise, and by six brace of anti-aircraft guns. There were forty Marines based there, six scientists, and eighty-odd workmen. Everyone had been screened back to his grandparents, and evidently none of the Old Companions had been able to worm in, since Bill Cuff hadn't known where the artificial moon was being constructed.

Pompey Island was about twelve miles to the south of Odo. There wasn't anything on it but trees and the only chuckle I could muster during that whole train ride was at the picture of Bill Cuff at the head of a hundred Neanderthal men (all clad in mammoth skins and carrying stone-headed clubs) landing on Pompey and roaring over it in search of my brother and his metal moon.

I had no idea why I was to meet Cuff in Boston. For all I knew, Nessa might be held in New York, in Alabama, or in Evanston, Ill-

inois. But I had to go to Boston, because I had no other lead whatever. I couldn't form plans because I was so totally in the dark. I just had to do what I could. And I had to be ready to think like lightning when I did meet Cuff and find out what was happening.

Just as we drew into the station, I used an old writer's trick: I swallowed a couple of dextrodine tablets so that for a few hours my fatigue would lie down and I'd have a kind of false vigor of intellect and muscles. I'd be mighty tired by morning, but for now I'd be at peak. I got off and took a taxi to a hotel near School Street. I bathed and shaved and checked my automatic and the extra clips in my jacket; then I ate an early supper and walked over to City Hall.

ON the nose of five o'clock a gray car drew up and one of the men in the back seat rolled down the window and gestured me over. I got in beside the driver and we moved away into the traffic. Nobody said anything until ~~we~~ we had left Boston behind and were almost into Lynn. Then Bill Cuff said from the back seat, "You seem pretty calm, Ray," and laughed. "That's the blood," he said admiringly. "That's the dark blood. A *man* would be fizzing and twitch-

ing and babbling his head off."

I had determined not to think any further than the rescue of Nessa. I wasn't going to bog down in speculations as to my humanness, or the truth of this whole theory of Cuff's; but even so, the chills chased over me when he said *man* like that. Wasn't I altogether human? Would I, too, eventually experience the dawn brain's awakening, the revulsion against humanity, the reversion to prehistoric emotion?

I said as casually as possible, "Seems you don't trust the dark blood any further than you could spit it, Bill."

"Not in you, not yet. I'm sorry about Nessa. She was a sensible precaution. You wouldn't think much of my wits if I hadn't taken her."

"Where is she?" I held my breath tensely.

"You'll see her at the end of the trip."

"And when's that?" My breathing relaxed a trifle.

"Few hours."

"He wants to know too much," said the driver. I looked over at him. He was a thick, short, shallow-templed fellow, gray of eye and straight of thin-lipped mouth. He had ears like a baby elephant's long unkempt hair draping over them. I could smell his breath three feet away.

"Shut up, Trutch," said Bill Cuff impatiently. "He's my cousin."

"But has he the dawn brain? Are you sure he—"

"Shut up. Just shut up," said Bill, and his voice was like that of a maniac holding himself in with a terrible effort.

"I don't think you ought to tell him things like —" persisted Trutch, and then Bill Cuff had leaned forward and given him a hell of a wallop on the side of the head with his open palm. The driver jerked forward and grunted and then he was quiet, as the car lurched and recovered. We were doing fifty. Cuff said, "Shut up! When I tell you that, do it!"

There were two other men in the back. One of them growled, "Easy, Bill. We live by the primal rage, but you must control it."

I TURNED and put my arm across the back of the seat and looked at the man who had spoken. He was another of the short and stocky breed. His eyes were snapping gray gems in a face as tan as a boot. He had more hair piled on top of his long skull than I ever saw on anyone but a movie actor: it was bright yellow, not gold but sulphur yellow, and slicked with oil. His features were broad and at the same time vulpine, the thickened muzzle of a fox. I had

meant only to glance at each of them in turn, but my gaze was held by this Old Companion. His expression was good-humored and yet he radiated evil, an old, old wickedness commingled with piercing intelligence. When at last I managed to tear my eyes from him, I knew that this was the worst of my enemies. I could not have defended that by logic, but neither could I have been argued out of it. I would have faced five giant Bill Cuffs rather than this yellow-haired creature.

"My name is Skagarach," he said to me, bringing my eyes back to him involuntarily. "I am third leader in our muster of the Old Companions. You have met the second leader, Old One. That is the true he of our folk. In time, in generations, we shall all look so, and the effete refinements of *Homo sapiens* will be gone." He glanced at Bill Cuff, who towered beside him, watching me. "Bill is first leader. In two years he has become so. He killed nineteen of us to gain that leadership." Skagarach smiled, cunningly and drily. I gathered that he was not fond of my cousin. And that was my first piece of real hope.

"The man at the wheel," he went on, "is called Trutch. As far as I know he has no other name. The fourth is Vance." This last

was a young fellow, about as wide as he was high, with the usual gray eyes.

"Are the eyes a distinguishing characteristic?" I asked.

"Some ninety per cent of us have them. You do yourself. But every gray-eyed man is not *Homo-Neanderthal* by any means."

"How *do* you — we — tell each other apart from men?"

"Actions: Cuff killed insanely, from a human viewpoint, that is, and then answered our telepathic call. Occasionally we have only actions, not mental communication, to judge by, and then we find the one who has gone berserk and test him. Sometimes the dawn brain returns to an Old Companion without the gift of telepathy."

"Suppose I were to say that I remembered being a caveman. How would you test that?"

Skagarach and Bill Cuff grinned. The other two seemed without humor. "Go ahead, tell us what you remember," said my cousin.

"I don't — but suppose I say, I remember hunting a mammoth . . ."

"You would be lying. You'd recall other things — mating with human women, being stalked to your death, fighting the upstart Man. You would have flashes of other centuries, of being named werewolf, vampire, hobgoblin, ogre,

bugbear and demon. Always the violence, the antagonism to man, the slaying and being slain. Not the common everyday life, but the high and savage points."

"I see. You give me a swell opportunity to lie to you," I told him candidly. I had nothing to lose, for I wouldn't bother lying. I had a hunch it wouldn't do me any good in this swift job I had to do.

"There are other checks on you," said Skagarach. He leaned forward suddenly. "Truthfully — *do you* have stirrings when I say those things? Does your brain murmur the least surprise of faintest recognition?"

"Truthfully," I said, "no."

"Never mind," said he, sitting back again. "It took me 17 years to develop the memory fully. Others are given it by a knock on the head, or even, as Cuff here, gain it full-blown in a few days with no stimulus from outside. You be patient, Ray. It will come."

And when it does, if it does, I thought, I hope I have the strength to kill myself before I stop being a man and turn into one of these prehistoric horrors!

Then I remembered that they claimed telepathic powers. I glanced from one to another. Either my sudden thought hadn't reached them, or they hadn't minded its

implications. I said tentatively, "Can you read the thoughts of other men?"

"Men, not other men," said Trutch viciously.

"Yes," said Skagarach.

Now I had spent a good many years around actors, and damned good ones at that. This Skagarach was an actor from the word go, but I believed that I was a better one. So I said carelessly, "Can you tell what I'm thinking?" and allowed my face to assume the tiniest lines of worry, the smallest indications of fear possible to the facial muscles. Skagarach said immediately, "You're fretting over your wife."

It was a good guess. He knew his book of reactions and signs inside and out. The only trouble was that I had at that moment been concentrating intently on a chocolate milk shake and a cheeseburger. I had even been saying the words over in my mind. So I knew that he had been trying to convince me of the truth of a lie, and that was another flake of hope for me.

It was a good thing for me that I had those few minute hopes. They were *all* I had.

CHAPTER V

IN THE late dusk of evening the car pulled off the road and rat-

tled over a field full of boulders and stopped at the top of a high cliff overlooking the sea. We all got out and stretched our cramped legs. Bill Cuff walked along the edge of the foreland until he came to a trace of path. He called to us and we followed him down the nearly-sheer face of the promontory, myself trying not to look at the dark foam spattered sea so far beneath our feet.

At the base of the promontory was a beach. It had looked tiny from above; I found that it was large, for the ocean had long ago hollowed out a great cavelike place in the rock, and the beach ran back under the land for several hundred feet. There were dim blue searchlights set up at intervals, which would not have been seen from any distance; no ship would come closer than a mile to the coast here, and so the presence of Old Companions in the cavern would be kept secret.

Old Companions . . .

Great God! What a horde swarmed in that hidden hole, across that rock-canopied beach! There were about two hundred of them. The majority were duplicates, in breadth of frame and depth of chest, of Trutch and Vance. The faces were handsome or ugly, grotesque or plain, yet all held the concentrated savagery

of my four escorts. Many had arms longer than normal. Some were so deformed that their gait as they crossed the sand on various errands was almost that of an ape that swings along on its knuckles. Again, several were tall and personable, like Bill Cuff.

They were all dressed darkly, in gray broadcloth or black wool jackets, crepe-soled shoes, no ties and no hats evident. Some of them were carrying things—submachine guns, handguns, even hand grenades—from broken crates to the six big boats that lined the water's edge. Others were giving orders in voices that were almost without exception gruff and barking. And everywhere I looked I caught the stare of gray eyes: eyes that took the blue glow of the searchlights and threw it back condensed and changed, so that from many dark faces there gleamed at me thin ovals of orange and crimson and green luminescence.

Now I knew for sure that the tale of the recrudescant apemen was no fable. Now the focused animal hatred of this pack washed over me like an unclean sea-wave full of crawling horrors and I realized fully and beyond a doubt that Bill Cuff's story was true, and that here in this cavern might well be the start of the finish of the human race.

"Where's Nessa?" I asked Skagarach. I spoke to him rather than to my cousin because I had a plan and this could well be the start of it.

"She's back there, I suppose," he said, gesturing to the rear of the beach. "First come and see the boats." He led me toward the dockless rim of the sea, and Bill Cuff came after us, glowering at him. I'd presumed he would hate any assumption of authority on Skagarach's part. The thing they called the primal rage bubbled near the surface in Bill Cuff.

THE boats were very like LCPs, with big bow ports closed by movable ramps. Skagarach said, "Yes, very like LCPs," which of course was not mind-reading, but intelligent guessing of my first thought. "We ground them on the beach, then they can be backed off easily, because of their specially designed propellers and rudders. The power comes from a reactor operating with thermal neutrons, and late refinements have made it almost wholly silent. This is the perfect transportation for us."

"To Pompey Island, naturally," I said.

"Naturally," said Bill Cuff in a surly tone. "We're going to pay Howard a visit."

"But what good will that do?"

"Don't be a burbling, maundering, congenital idiot, Ray," said Bill irritably. "That space station is the answer for us. With it we'll command the world."

"But how will you get it into the sky?"

"The same way the *men* were going to do it. Tow it with three stage rockets." He relaxed his expression of potential murder, and gripped me by the shoulder. His hand was like a bear trap. "There are musters of the Old Companions lying in wait near every rocket station on the seaboard. As soon as we've secured possession of the space station, they'll know it; and within fifteen minutes the rockets will be on the way to Pompey."

"Oh, wait a minute," I said. I was consumed with impatience to see Nessa, but the sheer incredibility of this plot had to be coped with now. These men were stark crazy . . . "If I dared to write up a yarn in which three-stage rockets were flown to an island and from there into the sky with a 237-foot-broad space station, my publisher would slit my throat with a rolled-up contract! Vampires are easier to believe than a wacked thing like that."

"Ray," said Bill Cuff, and suddenly from the growl in his voice I realized that I had been taking

liberties with a savage cave-brute, "Ray, do we seem like fumblerers to you?"

"No," I said.

"How do you think the *men* were going to do it?"

"I don't know, but I presumed they'd dismantle the station, after testing it, and tow it in parts into space, where they'd reassemble it."

"Dead wrong. They were going to carry it to the thousand-mile mark by three-stage rockets, yes; but as a whole, not in parts."

I didn't think it could be done."

"It can with the rockets they have. There've been improvements since you read about rocketry last, Ray." Cuff looked superior. As if he'd had something to do with the improvements, instead of squatting somewhere in a swamp. "And that isn't all. Those rockets are going to be towed themselves—from their bases to the site of the man-made moon—by smaller vehicles built on the principles of the VTO planes."

VTO — Vertical Take Off. Yes, it was remotely conceivable . . .

"But all this thud-and blunder business," I protested, turning to Skagarach. "You're dealing with the highest product of man. And you figure to take it over by a series of ambushes, wild attacks in the night, and in general the heavy hand of the apeman. It's straight

out of a nut hatch."

Then Bill Cuff hit me. I saw the swing coming, and the trunklike arm sweeping round and up with a fist like a boulder on the end of it, and I started to duck, and then the mountain collapsed on my skull and the blue lights went out, *wham!*

CHAPTER VI

I CAME gradually out of a scarlet fog into a jet-black well. My head, which was aching abominably, was pillowed on something soft and warm and slightly moving. I heard mutters of guttural voices, the slap of waves on metal. I licked my dry lips and tasted salt. Blood? No, ocean salt. We were at sea. I was a little chilly. I shivered, tried to see something, and made out the dim figure of a person above me. The sky was moonless and inky. I was lying with my head in this person's lap. I breathed deep and said quietly, "Nessa?"

"Yes, Ray."

I didn't have words. I reached up and touched her face with my fingers, and she bent and we kissed. "You okay?" I said then.

"I'm okay," said Nessa. That was all. For now, that was enough.

"Anybody near us?" I looked up at her tense face.

"I am," said Skagarach. He moved into my vision, and I sat up, head pounding, and stared at him until I could make out his foxy features. "I'm sorry," he said under his breath. "Cuff is on the primitive side. So are we all . . . but there ought to be limits. There was no sense in hitting you."

"I don't get it," I said. "Why is that big murder-machine the first leader, and not you, Skagarach?"

"Ah," he said. "Ah, yes. Some of us wonder about that too." For all his obvious intelligence, he was a sucker for a one-two compliment to the jaw.

"That was an awful belt he gave me," I said. Something had just occurred to me. "It kind of addled my brains. Lord, I'd like to hit him back for that!"

"Ray?" said Nessa uncertainly. She knew me for a strictly non-aggressive joe since I'd quit football.

"I feel—I feel furious," I said, and I hissed it low and aimed it at Skagarach. "I never had so much yearning to pulverize someone."

Skagarach leaned over and peered into my eyes. "Don't sit on it," he said. "Let it fume, let it rage. It may well be the primal anger. Let it have its way. Only—I don't suggest you hit Cuff."

"Not with my fists, anyway," I agreed. "Maybe with a gun butt."

"Let the rage bubble," he said, laughing almost without sound. "You'll do, Ray Rollins; I believe you'll do." He sat down, staring ahead.

I found Nessa's hand and squeezed it reassuringly. She must have been baffled by the things I'd said. Then I took up with Skagarach where I'd left off on the beach. "All this hand-to-hand combat rot," I said. "Where will that get you—us? Dealing with rockets and space stations, and doing it with submachineguns, after all. It's race suicide."

"You're thinking on the wrong tack. We are the primeval beings, yes; and we're facing, and prepared to use, the farthest reaches of scientific achievement. But look, Ray: if an intelligent caveman came among a group of moderns, and saw a gun lying there, and was taught how to use it, which would be the bright thing to do—snatch it and use it on them, or wade in with his fists?"

"We intend to blot out *Homo sapiens* and we shall do it. But not with stone clubs, not with revolvers. No, we'll lay hands tonight on man's greatest weapon, the only weapon which can be turned against the whole globe: the space station. You object to our primitive methods. You're not thinking deeply enough. The pure

science of the station, the rockets and the VTO tugs buffaloes you. You can't see a horde of men with handguns and grenades capturing those awesome devices."

"That's right, I can't."

"Why not? There is no more problem here than there is attacking a bank vault, or an outpost of soldiers. So far as the government knows, there is no secret army within its borders! They haven't the faintest notion that *we* exist, an army of manlike non-men.

"It's the broad conception that stumps you, Ray. So picture each operation by itself. The storming of the rocket ports—by quite adequate troops of ours, well-armed and savage. Then the towing of the rockets, by VTO tugs, to Pompey Island—this done by technicians and scientists who are not men, but Neanderthals. Then the locking of the space station to the rockets, and the takeoff for outer space. Sixty of us in these boats, plus twenty waiting with other musters at the rocket stations will man that moon. From attack on Pompey to blast-off from Terra should take from one to three hours."

"You are insane," said Nessa in a shocked voice.

"No," said Skagarach seriously, "we are sane. But we have fought for the existence of our race

through too many thousands of years, in too many lands and too many ages, to have mercy now that our hour is at hand."

I FELT as though I'd been dropped into icy water. Skagarach wasn't kidding. And Bill Cuff was worse than he.

And I had lied to them. I could picture in brain-shattering detail what they would do to Nessa when they discovered that; for my lie could blow up their whole scheme. They'd torture her, not me, for they needed me. I looked at the thought and I couldn't stand it.

I did the most cowardly thing a man could do: I stood up and betrayed my country, my world, and my entire breed. But I did it because I knew exactly how much I could take before I cracked—and while I might withstand their worst for a little while, they would inevitably do things to Nessa which I could not take.

"Skagarach," I said, "I won't try to fool you. I don't have any dawn memory. As far as I know I never ranged the fens or slew the upstart Man in the ages past." I was talking like him. He was an overwhelming personality. "But I know this: I feel a terrible, inchoate anger against almost everything. I think it must be what you call the primal rage. And I also

feel a hell of a strong kinship with you, if not with Bill Cuff. I lied to you. My brother and the space station aren't on Pompey. They're on Odo Island."

"Well," he said easily, "well, I thought you might have been trying to outwit us. I thought we might have to flay your woman an inch at a time to make you talk. But by God, that knock on the cranium fixed you! Congratulations—and welcome to the Old Companions." He chuckled. "If you wonder why we trusted your first word to such an extent, I'll say that we knew the moon was on one of these islands. We knew that if it wasn't Pompey, it wouldn't be too damned far." He started forward in the boat. "I'll change our course," he said.

And it was at that moment that I realized something. I had turned traitor because I couldn't let my wife be maltreated. I had counted on a feeble plot, a one-in-a-thousand chance that I would be able to beat the Old Companions; and I'd known quite well that I was only excusing myself for my craven weakness. Only now did I remember that the real answer, the only thing a *man* could have honorably done, was to kill Nessa and myself immediately—to grip her and leap into the sea, and dive deep and deeper until we both

drowned. Then my wife would have been safe from them, and I would be dead with a clean conscience.

But it was much too late to think of that now.

I flung myself down beside her, put my arms around her waist, and began softly and vividly cursing myself for the prize fool and the biggest yellow-livered skunk of all time.

CHAPTER VII

WE came in toward the shores of Odo Island at ten minutes to midnight. Bill Cuff and Skagarach and Trutch and I were sitting on the top of the bow ramp in the lead boat, straining our eyes toward the small forested bit of earth ahead. Starshine showed us a broken coastline of rock that didn't look passable, not for a monkey. I said so. Bill Cuff muttered, "We can make it."

Behind us crowded the cave beasts, each of them equipped with at least one weapon; some had grenades slung in belts over their shoulders, others carried .45 revolvers, Tommyguns, and rifles. Skagarach had apologized for not giving me a gun. He said that of course they couldn't trust me that far yet. I said it was okay. I had my own automatic and thank God

they hadn't discovered it.

Bill Cuff said now, "Tell them to bring the boats in just under the rocks, Skagarach."

Yellow-hair nodded and then after a moment had passed and he had not moved, I said, "He isn't doing it," to Bill in a tone of inquiry.

"He's done it. He telepathed it to them."

"Why didn't you?" I asked. Cuff, looking very annoyed, stared away from me, and Skagarach laughed maliciously "He can't telepath as smoothy as I, I'm afraid."

"Then why is he first leader?" I asked, chancing another swat on the head.

Bill Cuff, however, only stared at Skagarach evilly and said, "Because I'm the strongest of us all, and the smartest."

"That's opinion," said Skagarach.

"I'll show you proof if you want it," shouted Cuff angrily, but the yellow-haired one shook his head. "Not now, not now. This is our night."

The boats slid in beneath the walls of rock and the pilots skillfully halted them inches from the island. There was no way to go ashore except to leap to the rock and clutch and clamber upward. The rock wasn't sheer, but it was rough and cold and if not actually

dangerous, at least mighty uncomfortable. At midnight the first Neanderthal—Bill Cuff—jumped from the first boat, and at 12:06 two hundred of us stood on the island of Odo.

It was very dark here, darker than it had been on the sea; there were trees everywhere. But I found I could see outlines without trouble, if not actual features within those outlines. Looking around me, I saw in this way the figure of a woman, and knew it was Nessa.

"Nessa! How did you get here?" I said, shocked. "You oughtn't to climb—"

"Trutch carried her on his back," said Cuff. "Now shut up. Here we go."

As we moved off toward the center of Odo, I grasped my wife's arm. She seemed to draw away slightly. "What is it?" I whispered.

"I don't know. I — they've told me what this is about, and you seem to be one of them," she said uncertainly.

What to do? Reassure her? In the midst of these keen-eared, ravening animals? "I don't know," I said. "I don't really know where I stand. Except that I feel mad clean through." That was for the Old Companions' benefit. At the same time I gently squeezed her arm twice, and catching her eye,

winked. But in the dimness of the forest, I couldn't be sure she'd seen it.

We moved along an autumn-smelling trail that wandered through trees from which leaves fell in a constant erratic shower. The air was cold, a touch of sea-wind pimpling my flesh. I was in the forefront of the horde, with Cuff and Skagarach, Old One and Trutch and my wife Nessa. Now a scout came running back toward us, his gait a half-ape, half-dog loping. He spoke to Cuff in the hoarse brief gutturals of their primitive tongue.

"Trip-wires ahead," Cuff said. "Tell 'em, Skagarach."

THE first warning devices, evidently: wires that would set off signals in the headquarters of the Marines, doubtless, when anyone stumbled across them. Bill Cuff laughed. We marched on until the scout halted us with a gesture. Bill picked up Nessa and ran forward and leaped into the air, graceful, a great cat of a man. There were four wires at varying heights. Warned of them, we cleared them all. I would have touched one, but Trutch was at my side watching me.

Now we slowed our pace while more scouts prowled ahead. In about five minutes we were halted

again, this time by an eight-foot fence of barbed wire whose strands were only inches apart. "Oh, for God's sake," said Cuff, "they plant barbed wire in the woods and leave the trees hanging over it. How knuckleheaded do they think an enemy'd be? Climb up and jump over." He looked at Nessa. "I think we'll leave you here," he said slowly. "Ray cherishes your safety—and I might want a check on his loyalty. Trutch, keep her safe." The big-eared, lank-haired brute folded a paw over her wrist and dragged her to one side. I said sharply, "Treat her easily, you damn orangutan!" and started after them, till someone's open hand caught me on the chest and shoved me rudely on my tail. I got up and Nessa was gone.

We moved into the trees. I shinned up a smooth trunk for a couple of feet. Topping the fence, we launched ourselves into space—we looked like dark monkeys pouncing on a farmer's garden—and come to earth with soft thuds and here and there a jolted grunt. We went forward once more.

Now the trees were thinner and up ahead there were strange gleams and reflections in a darkness that appeared deeper than that which we had left behind. Of course, the canopy that looked like forest from the sky; and beneath it, the build-

ings and the field and the man-made moon. My blood grew a little colder. The incredible consequences of this expedition, if successful, hit me with the kick of a shod hoof. The end of man . . . *the end of man* . . . words so staggering you couldn't actually take them in. The end of man. Thanks to me . . .

The Old Companions were bunched, two hundred strong in a great knot of dimly-seen figures. Bill Cuff said to Skagarach, "Have them spread out. We go in from this side on a wide front."

Skagarach sent the mental order, and the crew thinned and left us. "You stick with Vance," my cousin said to me. "Just do as you're told. He'll keep you near me, but out of my hair." He bent toward me. "No funny stuff," he said malignantly. "No whooping and hollering to wake 'em up, Ray, boy. No last-minute regrets."

"No, Bill, no regrets." The falsehood of the century, I thought.

Vance carried a big .45 Colt. He was the squat young lug I'd met in the car. He prodded me with the barrel of his weapon and waved me off to the right. Now we were in a line, barely visible to one another, and we began to move slowly over the level ground, crouching, being as silent as so many shadows. I stepped on a stick and

broke it and Vance dug his revolver painfully into my ribs.

I had to warn the humans! My fate and—yes, even Nessa's, didn't matter worth a tinker's dam. All the important personal conceits and fears and longings were flushed out of me now. If I'd been a coward, I was now not a strong man, but simply a *man*, and I'd been absorbed into my race and made its representative. If I was torn apart by these throwbacks it wouldn't even hurt.

But I didn't have an idea in my head.

WE neared the field, and its diffused lighting, so like that in the blue cavern, showed me and my fellow attackers the shapes of monstrous unknown creations of metal, of square housings and low machine shops and sheds and barracks. Vance drew a little ahead of me. I heard him cock his Colt. And the idea I had determined to have came to me. It wasn't much of an idea. But the instant it struck me I put it into action, because I was facing great brute force and had no time for complex plots or civilized reasoning.

I took one swift step forward and smacked Vance behind the shoulder as hard as I could, an overhand blow with every ounce of muscle I could summon. At the same time

I drew my automatic from beneath my jacket.

The reflex I'd hoped for was Vance's instinctive yank on the trigger of that .45. Instead he moved to the side, swung his upper torso around, and fired point-blank at me.

His slug scorched along my ribs under the left arm, a leaden chunk of fire; I fell sideways and snapped a shot back at him. It was luck; I blew in his eye and tore out the back of his head.

He fell on top of me, and I squirmed around and shoved his body away.

At the sound of the shots every Old Companion leaped forward. That saved my skin. I hurled Vance off me, leaped up, and ran on to catch the Neanderthals, my torn side shrieking in pain.

A form cut across before me and a hand clamped on my arm while our forward charge continued. Skagarach's fox-face dipped sidelong toward me and he said, "What was it? Who did it?"

"I think it was Cuff," I panted. "What?"

"Looked like him. Whoever it was, he scored on me."

"Bad?"

"Not very."

"It couldn't have been Cuff," he growled, half to himself. "Primal rage isn't primal idiocy!"

"Somebody was idiotic," I said. We were nearing the field and the lights were brightening. I could see men running from the barracks and the sheds.

"We'll find out who it was. By God!" he said, lifting his voice. "When this is done, you'll see the fool's head torn from his shoulders!"

Then the field lit up around us and the machine guns started to chatter.

It must have been automatic, the banks of searchlights must have been triggered by our vanguard crossing electric eyes on the edge of the field. But the Marines, warned by my shot, were at their gun emplacements and ready. Several dozen Neanderthals died in that first couple of seconds before we all went to earth. I heard the choking screams and the thunk of bullets striking flesh. I dove to the ground. The air whined just over my head and I knew I hadn't hit dirt an instant too soon.

I hoped that Bill Cuff, that magnificent target, had been chopped in half . . .

Cuff's grenaders got into action then. There was the crump-crump and the screeching as grenades tore holes in earth and sandbags and metal and men. A Neanderthal stood up just in front of me and peered forward against the

lights' glare to check on the damage, and as I looked up at him I saw the entire top of his skull explode as a dozen slugs hit it. There were more grenades and then a tommygun opened up. I crawled forward.

Only the powers that be know why there were only forty Marines on Odo Island. There should have been four hundred. I suppose they counted on the dead secrecy to guard it. That, and the assurance that no foreign power could get within fifty miles of the place. Who could have foreseen Neanderthals from a past age in crepesoled shoes?

The Marines took a fearful toll of the Old Companions before they were obliterated. Within four or five minutes they had been overpowered and smashed into the bloody earth; but no more than seventy Neanderthals stood over their bodies and looked toward the great wheel-shaped satellite. I was sick to see that Bill Cuff and Skagarach were among them. And Old One, the true primordial brute, was there, though his left arm hung useless and dripped gore.

Then, before any of us could even speak, the sheds and barracks erupted more men: the eighty workers, hard strong men— and they too were armed.

My hopes soared, even as the

submachineguns began to talk in staccato bursts of ear-piercing sound.

CHAPTER VIII

THE workers were inadequately armed. A few revolvers and little ammo. Lead pipes and with things that looked like weapons but were actually odds and ends of tools they'd snatched up when they'd heard the battle start. They were armed with guts, but it wasn't enough.

They swept across the field, dropping and struggling up, bulling ahead to come to grips with an enemy they didn't understand, couldn't fathom. Perhaps a score of them survived the Tommy guns, got in amongst the Neanderthals. I saw one big fellow grab two ape-necks and smash the brutish skulls together, and even thirty feet off I could hear the bone splinter. When that man went down writhing I was as shocked as though he'd been my brother.

Where *was* Howard, anyway?

No one was watching me. I stepped swiftly backward, turned and ran for the satellite. There was no hiding place there worth a damn. I stood against its gleaming silver side towering high above my head. I saw the end of the fight; even had my chance to take

a small crack at the devils myself. A workman was brawling with a carbine as Old One came up behind him lifting him over his head and bringing his body down across an uplifted knee. There was a hoarse scream and then a loud crack as the man's back snapped. I lifted my automatic and shot the creature through the heart.

I looked for Skagarach then, and for my cousin, but they weren't in sight. I shoulder holstered my gun. The last worker now had been dropped and the Old Companions came toward the great wheel and me.

There were—I counted, automatically and hopefully—there were some fifty or more on their feet. Bill Cuff strode ahead of the horde, untouched and grinning wolfishly. And there was the ugly figure of Skagarach beside him.

I tackled Cuff immediately. "Skagarach says I can't have a gun, but I sure could have used one just now," I said, hoping he hadn't seen me firing the gun now, safely out of sight under my shirt.

Bill looked wickedly at Skagarach. Then he pulled a revolver from his belt and stuck it out to me. "Take it, you earned it."

Skagarach smirked; but his gray eyes flashed sullen hate at the big man, and I hoped anew that I could split them and make a re-

bellion in the ranks of the Neanderthals.

"I am second leader now," said Skagarach loudly, "as Old One is dead. I should have a voice in decisions such as that," and he gestured toward the gun I held. "However, I think Ray has earned it, too. Now let's get to business. We have to let the other musters know at once, so the three-stage rockets will come to Odo as fast as possible," he said, lifting his voice until it was a hoarse bellow. "Everyone quiet. This is a distance job, and difficult."

Bill Cuff watched him impatiently as the fox-face crinkled into furrows of thought. Then he said to me, not bothering to lower his voice, "You might think they'd have radioed for help, or that the scientists would be doing that now. Well, we've got hand-jammers on the LCPs that have been working since we touched the coast." Hand-jammers, invented only this year, tiny boxes that could jam radio, phone, television, in fact any method of communication from one spot to another. Odo was therefore isolated!

"Won't silence be suspicious?" I asked him. "Don't you suppose they'll begin to wonder, over on the mainland?"

"Hell, no. Too dangerous to keep up steady communications to

a place that's supposed to be as dead secret as this hunk of rock. You can bet only emergencies would make 'em radio from here." He laughed. "You see, we laid our plans well."

I HAD just thought of something, something big. I blurted it out before I'd more than recognized it as a possibility. "Here, Bill, for God's sake, how do we know this thing is ready to leave the earth?" I pointed to the metal moon. "How do we know it won't just come apart when we try to lift it?"

"There again," said Cuff, as Skagarach gave him a dirty look and obviously tried to concentrate, "we haven't just presumed, or taken our chances. We've been watching the three-stage rockets — and for two days they've been ready to go in an instant's notice. And two of our fellows reported that they had stand-by orders; they're on the rocket crews," he added smugly.

Skagarach said, "I've established contact with Milo. Now will you clamp your goddam jaws shut!"

Bill Cuff nearly hit him. I caught Bill's eye and gave a grin, as one who would say, Let the jerk strut, *you* can handle him later. Then, Bill turning away, I winked at Skagarach. Both ends had to be played against the middle fast and furious in this game.

"All right," said Skagarach finally. "Milo will keep touch while they make their moves, and so will Summers from post three. Now we have to get into this thing."

Cuff, overbearingly, shouted orders; and the Old Companions scattered to look for the entrance. A strange thing happened then, a weird thing to watch. Two of them remained standing before us as the others left. Cuff shouted at them. They did not move. Skagarach shook them by a shoulder each, and they collapsed without a sound. They had died on their feet, of wounds sustained in the fight. I was glad to see two more gone and at the same time I felt a chill at the tenacity of such a race.

A cry announced that the door had been found. We three ran over. There was a portable ramp running up to the sleek side. A door like that in a commercial plane showed its outline above the incline. Eagerly Cuff and several others leaped upward. And now they hit their first real unexpected obstruction, for the door could not possibly be opened from the outside. Not without TNT. It had been closed from within and it stared blindly at the Old Companions and in a moment they began to snarl and curse.

I turned away from them so that they wouldn't see my face, which I

knew must be hopeful; and across the brilliant field toward us I saw a man and a woman approaching. The man, or rather brute, was the gray-eyed Trutch. The girl was my wife Nessa, and she was walking as though she were in pain.

CHAPTER IX

I RAN and caught her in my arms. "Nessa! What is it?"

"I twisted my ankle," she murmured, not looking at me. "This man made me walk anyway." Then I'd knelt and lifted her in both arms. "Don't bother," she said, struggling half-heartedly. "I can go alone."

She believed that I was a beast-man myself, and with Trutch flapping his elephant ears alongside us, I couldn't tell her different. And of course, she might be right at that . . .

"You feel all right otherwise?" I asked her, gently. She nodded. She was pale and haggard and her hair hadn't been brushed for twenty-four hours, but for all that she was the most beautiful woman in America. The feel of her in my arms gave me strength. I carried her over and set her lightly on the ramp. The leaders were still fumbling around the door.

Then suddenly the door of the space station swung open.

I got a little sick.

My brother Howard stood there. He stood erect and his slight, white-smocked figure looked oddly noble above the dark-clad Neanderthals. He held his arms up; some of the Neanderthals raised their guns.

Howard said slowly, "No, don't do it. Please don't do it. You don't understand. This is security for all of us!"

They glanced at one another, Cuff's brows drew into a scowl, and then Skagarach, the best brain of the lot, cried, "Don't harm this man!" and leaped forward, stood with his body against the door so that it could not be closed. "He's necessary to the operation—he's vital." The Old Companions muttered and the weapons lowered. Skagarach said to Howard, "You think we've come to destroy the satellite. You believe we're aroused citizens, or religious fanatics, bent on halting the experiment. You're wrong."

That was, of course, the reason why my brother had opened the door: to keep what he thought were ordinary people from wrecking the man-made moon. From within the wheel he had seen them conquer the guards and workers, and by their plain clothes had imagined them to be a bunch of fanatics who couldn't stand the idea of a police-

man in the sky.

If the Old Companions had worn uniforms, Howard might have kept that door shut, and the whole Neanderthal plan would have collapsed. But he thought he could reason with these creatures.

Skagarach pushed past him and disappeared in the station. Bill Cuff, herding Nessa and Trutch and me ahead of him, followed, and the Old Companions trooped up the ramp behind us. Howard had seen me and was walking at my side. "If they don't want to destroy it, what *do* they want?" he kept repeating. I kept my mouth grimly shut. I couldn't explain it to him now, I couldn't begin to. "What are you doing here, Ray?" he asked then, and again I was stuck for an answer.

Trutch bent close to me, smirking. "Why, he brought us here," he said.

The important Old Companions assembled in what was intended to be the scientists' main living room, a section of the wheel lined with fold-up bunks and empty tv screens. From what little knowledge I had of the theory of the space station, I could identify the air purification system's tubes, the emergency geiger counters, the oxygen vents and, through a partly-open locker door, a space suit. The tv screens were either for com-

munication within the ship or connected with the cameras that would be trained on Terra 24 hours a day.

"Where are the others?" Bill Cuff asked Howard. "The other scientists?"

"Throughout the wheel."

"Good. They won't be hurt. You're all going to come in handy for us; three of our experts were killed on that field," said Cuff, his face dark and his teeth clenched so tightly I could hear them grind together.

"Who the hell planned that suicidal charge?" I asked.

"Our leader," said Skagarach drily. "Mister Cuff."

THE primal rage, my last hope, welled and subsided in Cuff as plainly as mercury in a thermometer. With what must have been a really superb effort he said in a quiet voice to Howard, "I'll fill you in, cousin, on what's happening," and proceeded to do so concisely and accurately.

Howard became pale, but bending forward he followed Cuff with attention and didn't open his mouth until Cuff had finished. Then he said just two words. "My God!" He looked at me. "And you're with them?" he asked.

"What else? I have the dark blood," I said. He made as if

to say something, and then looked at Cuff.

"So do you," Bill told him.

Skagarach said, "I think Summers has been killed. Milo is being shelled with mortars, but his muster is winning. We should have the three-stage rockets here within half an hour."

The other scientists, five men ranging from thirty to fifty years old, had been brought in by Neanderthals. Cuff glanced at them now and then said to Howard, "I want you to take us on a tour of the station immediately. I want you to show me and Skagarach, and our technical officers, exactly how everything is worked, from the H-bomb launchers to the refuse outlets. Eventually you'll come over to us, Howard; but for now you've got to show us under pressure, I realize." His eye roamed the room. He pointed to the tallest scientist, a man nearly as bulky as Bill Cuff himself. "What's his job?"

"Communications technician," said Howard blankly.

On the words, Cuff was out of his chair, hurtling across the room; he shot his great arms out and gripped the astounded scientist by the throat and the top of his head. Whirling, he flying-mared the man over his shoulder, and as the scientist's heavy frame nearly touched the floor, Cuff perked upward

again, so that the whole body was snapped like a blacksnake whip. There was a terrible cracking sound and the man's form went limp. Cuff dropped the body to the floor and stepped over it.

"Only an example, Howard," said the Neanderthal easily. He came back to his seat. Nessa was sobbing hysterically, and all the men were white as chalk.

Skagarach said, "Probably unnecessary, but vivid enough," and laughed. Cuff said, "All right, Howard, will you show us the station?"

"Do it," I said to my brother in a low tone. He looked at me and his eyes were a little wet. He shook himself and said, "Come on," in a dull voice. Howard was not afraid of anything, I know, but Cuff's unvoiced threat, to act with each of the other scientists in turn as he had with the communications technician, appalled my brother and dulled his reasoning—even as Nessa's danger had dulled mine in the boat. We followed him through an automatically operated door into the next chamber.

For half an hour we worked through the space station, Howard pointing out in an emotionless voice the personnel quarters, control room, the gauge panels, fuel storage tanks (for the small rocket clamped to the center spoke of the

wheel and reserved for emergency flight back to Terra), the space suits and the many instrument panels. We saw television cameras so powerful that from the 1,000-mile altitude they could pick up movements as small as those made by a single man on a prairie. We saw the astrodome, the oxygen supplies, the air blower pump, the air locks and moon-to-earth radios; the recreation area and the radar equipment. Everything that would support life in space.

Last of all we saw the weapons: the levers that would release the hell-bombs and guided missiles, the aiming mechanisms, the terrible arsenal that was to threaten the world and keep it under control, at the benevolent mercy of the men who lived within the wheel.

Bill Cuff exulted. "In five days," he said, and then stopped. I knew what he meant. In five days all the Neanderthals on earth would be congregated in specified sanctuaries, and mankind would die. These projectiles would mop up the cities and towns, and the Old Companions would then sweep over the countrysides, slaying what remained of Homo sapiens.

One thing which we'd been shown had given me an idea. One of those hundreds of gadgets and mechanisms.

Queerly enough, I wouldn't or-

dinarily have thought of it as a weapon.

It was the air blower pump.

CHAPTER X

SKAGARACH said, "They're here!" so sharply that it startled all of us, even Cuff. He continued more quietly. "They've brought down two of the rockets and the third will be here soon." He went on, and the other Old Companions crowded around him, listening eagerly as he told of the battles as the news was telepathed to him. I looked quickly for my guard, Trutch. He was turned with his back to me. I moved swiftly across to where Howard stood talking to Nessa. They saw me coming and their faces hardened. I started talking in a monotone, pitching my voice to reach them alone.

"Do you two still think I'm pulling a quisling?" I drew my automatic and handed it to Howard. "Put that away, quick. Now listen. We're going to whip these cave bastards. Don't ask questions, just answer, and make it fast. How do you run the air blower pump up to full capacity?"

Howard looked puzzled but not quite so uncertain of me. He gave me brief explicit instructions.

"And what would the effect be?"

I asked.

"About a hundred-and-twenty-mile gale through the whole ship," he answered. As he talked I was handing him the extra clips for my gun and he was stowing them in his pockets. Even Nessa looked hopeful now. I flicked a glance every second or two at the huddling Neanderthals. There were a dozen of them here; the others were stationed throughout the satellite.

"Now," I said, "what would make this metal moon vibrate?"

"Vibrate? Nothing—wait. If you extended the solar mirrors, it wouldn't exactly vibrate, but it would move. The mirrors are under the hub, and extending them while we're on the ground would lift the wheel gradually up, likely tilt it, unless the mirror system broke under all this weight."

"Can you extend them?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Check your watch. 1:36 a.m. In ten minutes, you will have eluded these apes and you'll start the mirror mechanism. Take Nessa if you possibly can. When you've done it, come a-blasting."

"What?"

"Start gunning the apes."

Then Skagarach called to me, and I went over to him. "My brother's mad," I said. "I mean he's angry about this."

"What carrier of the dark blood

wouldn't be?" said Skagarach loftily.

I said, "I think he'll come around to us eventually."

Trutch had come to my side again, frowning angrily at me. Skagarach said, "Let him alone, you fool, he's all right. Go watch his brother." And Trutch hulked over to Howard and Nessa.

I turned to Bill Cuff, "How soon do we take off?"

"As fast as the other musters can couple the rockets to the station," he said. "Shouldn't be too long. Why?"

"I was thinking maybe we could watch them at it."

"How?"

"On the viewplates back there," I said, jerking a thumb over my shoulder. "At least two or three of us could watch." The wheel had been closed and sealed by the air locks, but by opening the small view ports we would be able to see all around us, while we sat before screens that transferred the ports' vistas to us in the cabin.

Skagarach said, "Come with us," and he and Bill Cuff strode off. I kept pace with them, hoping the rest of the job would be as easy as this. We passed through two sections of the wheel and entered the viewing room and took seats before the scanners. Bill fiddled with the dials as I cast a look at

the next door, some dozen feet from where I sat. Just beyond it was the air blower pump. I checked the time. I had six minutes.

THE screens flashed to life. We saw the field around us, and two gigantic rockets, silver with thick blue bands dividing each into three sections, the three-stagers that would shortly hurtle us out beyond the atmosphere. Skagarach began working with the control panel too. At last we had a complete view of all sides of the wheel.

Many Old Companions, from the musters which had captured the rockets and brought them here by VTO tug, were hurrying from wheel-side to rocket, working under the orders of their experts to attach all components together. This was a purely mechanical job, but I doubted that it would be done quite so quickly as my comrades seemed to believe. I saw at least two fumbling attempts to clamp a single connection that failed miserably. Skagarach scowled and Cuff told him to telepath Milo to get down to business. They both breathed heavily through their nostrils.

Then I started to needle them.

It was a hell of a job, doing it without making them enraged with *me*. First I would ask Skagarach's opinion on something, then Cuff

would sneer at it, and I would give Cuff a gentle push toward anger. It was like taking two wildcats, one in each hand, and teasing them so that they'd fly at each other's throats—ignoring the man who was actually baiting them. Sweat sprang out on my face and my hands were moist.

What did it was an inspired reference to telepathy. That was Cuff's sore spot. He turned to Skagarach, eyes narrowed, big hands working malevolently, and I looked at my watch and saw I had six seconds to go; I said, "But isn't telepathy the major need of a first leader?" with innocence dripping from my voice, and Skagarach laughed harshly and said a sane being would presume it was, and then Bill Cuff leaned over and hit him in the mouth.

Skagarach recoiled, spat, and then lashed back with a fist that, if smaller than Cuff's, was still larger than anything you'd care to have sock you in the nose. Then they were growling like dogs and trying to strangle one another.

I didn't count on this for a finish fight; I knew it must have happened often enough before, the meeting of these two brutal creatures; and I thought they were at bottom too dependent on each other, Cuff for Skagarach's telepathic powers and the yellow-hair for my

cousin's primordial power, ever to actually fight to the death. But this was all I'd gambled for, this infuriated scuffle.

I leaned across the great board of instruments. The revolver I'd been given was in my hand, reversed. I struck the master switch twice, hard, with the butt of the gun. The second blow knocked it out of alignment and the screens went blank.

At that instant the space station shuddered, like a live thing beginning to arouse from sleep, and the floor vibrated a little beneath my feet. Howard had reached the switch of the solar mirrors, and gradually they were pushing out from the underside, pressing the ground, raising the wheel into the air. I wondered how long it would take them to reach their full extent or to break off. I prayed it would be a few minutes at least . . .

At the first sensation of movement, the titans had frozen, Skagarach in the act of drawing back a fist, Cuff with his hands twined in the long oily hair of the fox-faced Neanderthal. In a split second they were on their feet and leaning over the control panels.

"The viewers are dark!" yelled Skagarach.

"We've taken off!" I shouted in the same instant.

"They couldn't." That was Bill

Cuff, jiggling a useless lever furiously. "Unless you ordered them too, you damn—"

"I did no such thing!" screeched Skagarach. If the viewers had been on, they would have seen that we were still on the ground. If Howard hadn't started the mirrors out, they'd have discovered my sabotage on the screens. The gamble had thus far panned out. Now I had to make the last try. I shoved open the door at my elbow, dashed into the chamber which held the air blower pump. Yelling wildly, "*What'll we do now?*" I followed Howard's instructions for bringing the blower to full power. Then I leaped into the other room again.

They were so demoralized that I might have shot them both in that moment. Something held me from it. I think it was their inhuman strength, the knowledge that these two were the highest product of a race that was not human. Despite the dark blood I knew ran in my body too, I could not feel that I was Neanderthal; and I could not tackle the two toughest Neanderthals at the outset of the private war I had begun. I was—well, I must face it, I was *scared*.

As the blower vents started to pour a hurricane of air into the chambers of the great wheel, I

leaped past them, flicked on the intercom switch, and bellowed, "Hit the bunks! Lie down and strap yourselves in! *Fast!*"

Skagarach had time for one approving look in my direction. "Good Companion!" he said. "You will do!" Then the three of us broke for the next room and the bunks.

CHAPTER XI

I HAD no intention of flinging myself onto a bunk. I let them do it, ran into the next chamber and hurled the door closed behind me. My order had carried throughout the station. In each of the rooms, otherwise soundproof, my order to lie down had been heard and followed.

I had counted upon the gradual raising of the wheel by the mirrors, and the tremendous pressure of the hundreds of blower vents, to create the illusion of upward motion. I had counted also on the Old Companions having no more idea than the average man in the street of what actually happened when a space ship took off. When the jet of one of those air vents hit a Neanderthal in the face, he naturally believed it to be the pressure on him of an accelerating motion straight up. And he listened to my broadcast advice, and

hit for the bunks.

In the first room I found five Neanderthals, all hastily buckling straps across themselves and whining fearfully. I had no more time for mercy, no more inclination for it than had these beasts themselves. Standing in the center of the chamber, I rotated slowly and put a bullet into each ugly face. Then I pounced on the next door.

Here there were four, and I suddenly realized I had no more than one bullet left in the revolver. I saw a Tommy gun beside a bunk. I went for it, knelt, and as my fingers touched it a hand came down on the back of my neck and clutched ferociously.

"What you doing?" snarled the Old Companion, lifting me and breathing into my face.

Seconds count, seconds . . . I knew that after a minute or two of nothing but slow vibration and hurricane breeze, Skagarach or somebody would realize that we were still anchored to Terra. The machine gun was in my hand now. I brought up its muzzle like a lance jerked underhand; the sight tore the beast's chin and lip, turned up his nose and the blood gushed. He recoiled, and I had the weapon in my hands and was stepping back and the chattering began. I made a massacre and went on.

There was a scientist among the

Old Companions in the next section of the wheel. My illusion must have been *good*—he had strapped himself down too! I sprayed the bunks with leaden death and then roared at him: "Come on! Get a couple of guns and come on! We are taking over this moon!"

There were three small chambers next with perhaps a dozen Old Companions shivering in them, and I left those chambers a gore-splattered, reeking ruin. The trembling of the station had slowed now, but the great wind that swept every corner still held the terrified brutes to their straps and beds. I picked up another of the scientists and was joined by the first one. Three of us marched through gleaming steel and chrome, soft white light and antiseptic cleanliness, marched at triple time and dealt death from heated barrels and rattling magazines.

We met Nessa and Howard. By now my arms were trembling and the sweat of fury and work was half blinding me. I grinned at them and took time to rub a sleeve across my eyes. "We're winning," I said. Nessa said *ohh* in a tiny sound of heartfelt thanksgiving. Howard said, "I managed to knock out that broad homely chap," which for some reason struck me as funny, and I passed them, laughing aloud. They followed me.

The fake was wearing thin. Now we found Neanderthals on their feet, puzzled and still frightened, but beginning to wonder why they were able to stand at all if we were in flight. Now we found enemies who, if given the chance, shot back. Now it was no pogrom, but a war.

Yet gradually we worked our way through the wheel, and although two of our scientists dropped, we had surprise and luck with us.

I came to a door that I could not open. Tucking the gun under my arm—I had long ago run out of ammo for the first, and found myself another in the grasp of an Old Companion with a scarlet smear for a face—I hurled my shoulder against the thick steel of the panel. It opened grudgingly. What had held it was the corpse of a Neanderthal. I had come full circle, not even noticing that I had passed through the control room and the chamber where Cuff and Skagarach should have been lying. The Old Companions were dead or dying, those of this muster at least, but the two most dangerous had vanished.

I made sure that Howard was armed. The last two scientists had now joined us. I sent the three of them back along our bloody route, and with Nessa held protectively against my side I went forward,

scouting cautiously and examining every compartment. I met Howard on the opposite side of the wheel.

We had not found Bill Cuff nor the yellow-haired fox.

CHAPTER XII

"THEY couldn't have left the station," said Howard again. We were sitting in the red-spangled recreation room, avoiding the sight of the Neanderthal bodies by looking at one another, and drinking whiskey and water that my brother had produced from a wall compartment. "No," he said, as I started to protest, "I tell you I locked the outer door when you all came in, throwing the switch that's camouflaged beside it, and nobody but one of my own men could possibly have discovered it. Besides, if they'd gone out, the door would be open. You can't close it from the outside."

"But I checked every hiding place—"

"Ray," he said gently, "you couldn't check every one in less than an hour. You can't even see most of them."

"Judas priest! Then we're locked in with those two—and outside there are Lord knows how many more, whimpering for our blood!"

"As for those outside," said my brother slowly, "we could blow them

up—while nothing short of an atomic explosion could break into the wheel."

"How could we blow them up?"

"I showed you. The atom cannons, the weapons that were meant to repel any hypothetical enemy attack when the station is freewheeling in space. There are gun ports on every curve, Ray." He sighed. "Two hours ago I was a peaceable man, I was here because I loved peace above everything else. Now I want to keep on killing people."

"They aren't people, they're cave beasts. They admit to being non-human."

"Yes. They make a good case for it, too. But it's too much like shooting sitting ducks, or fish in a barrel, for my taste."

"If you'd seen them gunning those poor workers, you wouldn't talk about sitting ducks. They're merciless. And by the way," I said, "why didn't you see that? Why didn't you cut loose with your wonder weapons during the fight?"

"Ray, this wheel is soundproof. It was only by chance that I happened to glance out, by way of a viewer, as you came up the ramp. And of course then I wasn't fully aware of the extent of the killing, or I might have used the guns instead of trying to talk to them." Howard sighed again. "I'm not the violent sort. I guess I would-

n't have thought of the guns anyhow." He looked thoughtfully at me. "I wonder why the Marines didn't radio to us when it began?"

"The Old Companions are hand-jamming the island."

"Oh." He glanced at the corner, where Trutch lay, bound hand and foot and grimacing at us. He was our only prisoner. "It's a fairy tale," he said. "It's *unreal*!"

"It won't be so unreal if the other Neanderthal musters succeed in blasting us out into an orbit, Howard."

Nessa began to cry. I wouldn't have known it, she did it so silently, but I happened to see a tear glisten on her cheek. "What is it, honey?" I asked, going to her.

"The baby," she whispered, and then she was choked and couldn't speak. But it hit me at once: acceleration would at the least lose us our child, and probably also kill my wife.

I jumped up. "Come on, all of you," I snapped. "Stick together and follow me quick. We've got to lay that field waste, before we're catapulted into the void. And don't lag, because Cuff could take any one of us between two fingers and snap us in half."

Howard led us to the control room of the armory. Here the viewers hadn't been affected by my sabotage. We saw the field

again, and the three-stage rockets—they had all been brought to Odo by this time—in the last moments of their attaching. The solar mirrors had slowly collapsed, letting the great wheel down to earth again. It didn't look as if we had more than a couple of minutes to go. Howard sat down, his movements irritatingly deliberate, and began to point out the trigger assemblies, the sighters, and the ammo reserve levers.

I waited till I got the set-up, then shoved him aside and sat down in his place. "This is my job, son," I said. "Allow me the dirty work. I feel just savage enough to enjoy it."

I SPRAYED the field with a hail of dumdum slugs from the supermachine guns; then, when I'd picked off everyone in sight, I turned to the atomic heat throwers. I couldn't use the explosive shells and rockets because of what the concussion and fragmentation might do to the space station itself, so I trained the heaters on the top third of each rocket in turn, and simply melted it into thick silvery goo. The lower portions I avoided, for fear of setting off the stored fuel. The three-stage rockets, naturally, carried no weapons. They couldn't fight back. It was wholesale murder, but I kept

at it. It was their deaths, or that of mankind.

At last I leaned back. "That's it," I said. "All but for Cuff and Skagarach, that's it." *And the thousands of Old Companions hidden all over the world*, I thought; but that was a problem for the future, and for better men than I.

Nessa said, "I want to speak to Ray. Alone. Please."

"Be careful," I said to Howard, as he and the three scientists moved out of the armory chamber. Then I was standing to face my wife.

"Ray," she said quietly, "I know why you told them about Odo. I didn't know at the time because I was confused by your wild talk. I just thought you'd become one of *them*. I know now you did it to save me from torture." She put her slim hands on my shoulders. "I don't have to ask this, I don't need reassurance on it—but I want to hear you tell me. It's true, isn't it?"

"Yes, Nessa. I banked on beating them, but I didn't honestly have an idea that I could. Still I knew that I couldn't see them touch you."

"You stacked the human race against me, and picked me. I suppose that's quite terrible," she said, and she was crying and laughing all at once, "but if you think I'll

ever reproach you for it, you're insane. I think it must be the finest compliment a girl ever received. If I could love you any more than I did before today, Ray, I would."

Then she was in my arms . . .

When she had finally freed herself, she said, "Is it true what Cuff said, that you're related to him and to those monstrosities?"

I nodded. I couldn't very well lie to her when the facts were there. "It is true."

"And our baby will be—"

"Yes. But the story of the 'dark blood' has to be proven to us before we start worrying," I lied. That was bravado and she recognized it, but she looked happier. "I don't care if you're half sabretooth tiger, I love you."

I reached for her again. Then I caught a flicker of something in the edge of my eye and whirled.

Bill Cuff was baring his teeth at me not two yards away.

CHAPTER XIII

MY right index finger tightened on the trigger of a gun that wasn't in my hand. I'd left it lying beside the controls of the outside armament.

Skagarach's yellow mop showed behind Cuff. Like a tin soldier, mindless but destined to fight with or without weapons, I stepped to-

ward Cuff. I saw that he had no gun either. But Skagarach held a big .45.

Nobody spoke. I knew by instinct that they realized now who their betrayer had been. They wanted to shred me up with their hands; they wouldn't use lead on Ray Rollins. I had taken two steps and was up to Bill Cuff and abruptly a rage overcame me that rivaled their vaunted primal ire. What the hell were they doing here? How dared these two things that ought to have been cons dead and turned to dust come into this room when I was telling my wife that I loved her? I saw my finish in Cuff's gray smoldering eyes and I would not stand for it. With a mad suddenness I hit Bill Cuff in the pit of the stomach while his hands dangled motionless. It should have folded him over like an axed sapling. He coughed once, and then he reached out and took me.

I had seen what he could do with those hands. But even as he lifted me free of the floor, I wrenched up a punch from my waist that caught him smack in the right eye. It was a lucky blow for it hurt him in the only vulnerable spot in all that magnificent frame. He yelled and clenched his grip tighter, but he dropped his head and shook it, squinting the injured eye. I rabbit-punched him at the base of

the skull, just behind the ear. It wasn't a good rabbit-punch by any means, for I was in agony with the bite of those fingers of steel in my flesh, but it added to his pain and one of his hands left me for an instant.

I was still dangling in midair. Now I hurled all my weight sideways, and he lost his grip and grabbed for me again. I fell to the floor and twisted between his legs, diving for the control board where my pistol lay.

Something crashed in my ear. I felt that my skull was flying apart, splintering off to the corners of the earth. I rolled like a shot hare and fought to keep my senses. I seemed to go down into red nothingness and struggle back up to the white light of the chamber, and discovered that Cuff was just turning around to me, and I had barely stopped rolling. I was against the curved wall.

Skagarach had shot at me and my head was ringing. I had lost my bearings for no more than a second.

I jumped to my feet and already the noise and pain was fading. My head must have been creased. I saw Nessa step in front of the yellow-haired beast and then almost by reflex I did what I'd have done years before on the football field. I collected my strength and hurl-

ed myself at Cuff's shins in a flying tackle.

He was a brawler, a magnificent piece of muscle, but his technique was to pick people up and tear them apart. At fighting this way, falling and being walloped himself, he wasn't so good. What I had to do was avoid being gripped by those bear-traps of his, and whittle him down. Maybe I could do it, if Skagarach would let me.

As I catapulted out of the way of a flailing paw, and gained my feet again, I saw Skagarach fling Nessa to the side, swearing in gutturals. I was standing by the control board and my heavy revolver lay within reach of my hand. I snatched it and the basic infuriated male animal was uppermost in me and I didn't even recognize what I held. It wasn't a gun, it was a heavy projectile. I threw it at Skagarach as he aimed his own weapon at me. My gun crashed into his face. He dropped as if he'd been shot.

Shot! My God! I'd thrown a loaded revolver away!

BILL Cuff was up and the room was too tiny for ducking purposes. I eluded one massive arm but the other enfolded me from behind and the giant hand clasped my shirt front. I aimed a kick for his groin, and saw the fist coming

in time to duck and catch the blow slanting on the side of my face. I thought my cheek had been ripped off.

He still had me fast but I jammed down my heels and thrust my whole body backwards. The cloth went to hell, and I was free.

He bore down like a bulldozer. I was in a corner, unable to dive under his hands or between his legs, unable now to avoid those deadly fingers. I backed and there was a stool behind me. My groping hands discovered nothing to snatch and throw. Without reasoning I leaped up and landed on the stool, a short thing about twelve or fourteen inches high. Then the football period came back again, and I could almost see the field before me and the men pushing in to stop me from making that punt . . .

I swung my right foot back in a short arc and swept it forward and up, old science and old muscles responding to my need, and neatly and viciously I drop-kicked Bill Cuff under the chin.

His head jerked back and there was a report like a .22 rifle going off. He crumpled down into himself like a granite pile collapsing. I knew without looking close that he was good and dead.

I jumped off the stool, over his body. Skagarach had managed to

get to his knees, holding his pistol limply and staring at me with blood trickling down his face. I leaped at him and he brought up the gun and shot wildly. Then I was on top of him and there was another shot and his foxlike face smoothed out and became loose, and his gray eyes rolled back till the yellow whites showed. I got slowly to my feet. It was all done.

Taking Nessa and holding her trembling body close to mine, I turned to the door and opened it. The three scientists were sitting in the next room, smoking and waiting for us. The soundproof door had kept our riot secret.

Howard gazed at us and smiled. "The love feast all finished?" he asked.

I nodded.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER what seemed a long time our radio came on. The Army had landed, the Old Companions in the boats were overwhelmed, and their hand-jammers put out of commission. Thankfully we prepared to leave the bloody metal moon.

As we walked toward the door, Howard snapped his fingers. "Good Lord, I remember what it was!" he said to me. "I know what I had to tell you. You seemed pretty worried about our being related

to Bill Cuff."

"Well, aren't you?"

"Hell," he said, "I thought you knew about that business years ago. Everyone else in the family did. Bill's father was supposed to be our mother's brother, right?"

"Sure," I said blankly.

"A lot of nonsense," Howard said irritably "Once John was dead a year before Bill was born. As far as we know, Bill's father was a traveling salesman."

It took ten minutes for it to sink clear in. Then I started to celebrate my release from the horrible mental bondage. I did it in a quiet way. I sat in the plane that was taking us home, and I held Nessa very closely.

I was human. Our child would be human. Nothing else could matter at all.

There was a lot of work to be done even yet, of course. The Old Companions had to be ferreted out, dug from their holes, sought in cities and swamps and villages and caves. In that work we had unexpected help: there are traitors to every cause, good and bad, those who'll turn coat when the going gets rough, and even the boasting Neanderthals were no exception. Our turncoat was the captive Trutch. He had a prodigious memory and he had been high in the councils of the Cuff muster. He

named names and located HQs. He was like a cur, savage in a pack but now, standing alone in a cage, fawning and eager to please.

Truch's reward, when the last of the recrudescient cavemen had been tracked and found and annihilated, was his life. He was sterilized and given a farm all for himself—an extremely well-guarded farm, for even when they were gone the Old Companions left an aura of unease and fear on the land.

It's over now. It can't happen again; we'll be on the watch for

the primal rage, the wakening dawn memory in those who may remain as carriers of the dark blood. The man-made moon rides high in space by day and night, watching the world with unfailing vigilance.

My brother Howard is up there as I write.

And Nessa is in the nursery putting our infant son to bed. I hope that one day he'll join many other men in space.

That's the future — our *real* future—and heritage . . .

THE END



"Jenkins, how many times have I told you I can't understand a darn thing you say when you mumble like that."

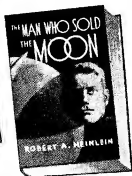
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**Charley's practical joke was usually good
for a laugh when a city feller made a rest stop;
but it also aroused heavenly concern and began—**

The Battle of the Bells

By

Jerome Bixby

IT would happen maybe once or twice a week—never much more. Because things had to be just right.

For example, it had to be day-time for it to work. At night, nobody was likely to notice the chain hanging down with the handle on the end of it.

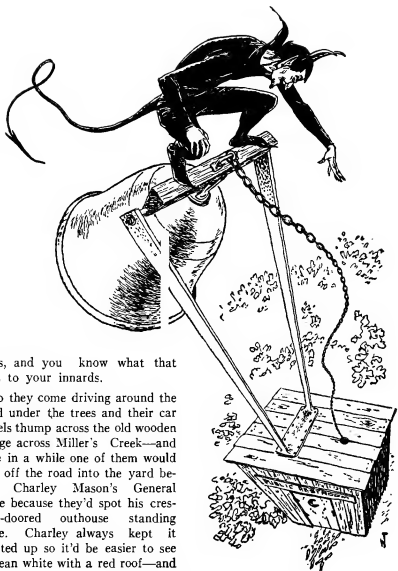
And naturally the victims had to be city folk. Had to be used to just reaching up and grabbing and pulling without a thought. Because when you stop to think about it, a chain like that in a place like that is about the most unlikely thing in the world.

But it worked—it worked often enough to bring grins to the faces of any men who were around at the time, and enough to make the town women sometimes a little cool toward Charley Mason when they went in to buy things at his store. Because it was strictly a man's

joke, and he was the man.

OWENSVILLE is a small town in western Pennsylvania. It sits low in one end of a green-sided valley, just a few frame houses and stores strung along a main street . . . and that main street is on the one and only road that leads through the valley: a road that all the maps show to be a convenient and dependable connection between the Penn Turnpike and several other major routes, should you be heading south.

So a lot of people drive through Owensville every week—upwards of two hundred or so. And there's always one or two of them in the mood to spend a little time in a restroom—the last Howard Johnson's is twenty miles back along the Turnpike, and the road down into the valley is a bumpy one be-



sides, and you know what that does to your innards.

So they come driving around the bend under the trees and their car wheels thump across the old wooden bridge across Miller's Creek—and once in a while one of them would pull off the road into the yard beside Charley Mason's General Store because they'd spot his crescent-doored outhouse standing there. Charley always kept it painted up so it'd be easier to see—clean white with a red roof—and

over the door he'd lettered, big enough to see from the bridge, PUBLIC RESTROOM.

Then somebody'd get out of the car and go in, and a few minutes later the chain that came up through the roof would yank down as whoever was inside reached up and pulled the handle.

And then the big old cowbell on the roof—the biggest and noisiest Charley'd been able to find—would dance around in the mounting he'd made out of an angle-iron, and go *Blongle, blongle, blok!*

After a minute the door'd open and the city folk would come out, looking puzzled and kind of sneaky. They'd give a glance up at the roof and see the cowbell mounted there. Some of them might grin at the way they'd been had. But mostly they'd get into their car and drive off maybe a little faster'n they would've ordinarily.

If it was a woman, it was five times as funny. Because some of the older men were always sitting around on the porch of Charley's store playing pinochle, or lounging down by the bridge just talking, and when the woman would come out they'd all grin at her and those who had mustaches might twiddle them a bit, and she'd get redder'n a bushel of tomatoes.

Women drove off faster'n anybody, usually.

Some townspeople said it wasn't a very good way to advertise Owensville to passersby. But Charley said that a town of thirty-two people didn't have to worry about advertising one way or the other—it just needed diversion. And since it was on his property, the cowbell stayed up.

It was just a gag. It never really hurt anybody. Charley, who could incline to philosophy when it suited him, said that the only person it could hurt was somebody who was plain ashamed of being human. And, on the personal side, he admitted he got a kick out of seeing them all flustered up that way.

Probably the outhouse and the bell'd still be there, and Charley'd still be getting his laughs, if the fat lady in the green convertible hadn't decided to do some praying.

IT was a late July afternoon, and plenty hot. The sun was reflecting like yellow-green fire off the hills around, and everybody was sitting in the shade.

Charley Mason and Sam Knudson were sitting on the store porch playing gin, and Luke Yates was just coming up the steps, when they heard a car approaching.

Charley and Sam paused in their game and Luke turned his gray head to look.

"Maybe this time," Charley said.

Luke Yates studied the dust cloud moving toward town above the tops of the trees.

"Coming pretty fast," he said. "Bet they drive right on through."

"A dollar," said Charley. "You bounce harder when you drive fast."

"It's on" said Luke.

Waiting, Charley Mason leaned back in his chair and half-closed his eyes, a lean, bald man in shirt-sleeves, the hand holding his cards relaxed in his lap. They could hear the murmur of the creek carrying away the runoff from last night's rain, and the air was sweet with the breath of the fields off down the valley.

"Rich man," said Charley, looking across the yard at his outhouse, "poor man, beggar man, thief. In there, you're all alike in the eyes of God, I guess."

Sam Knudson nodded thoughtfully. "In the eyes of *something*, at any rate."

"All alike," said Luke Yates.

"Can't see your wallet from *there*," Charley said.

"Your brains either," said Luke.

After a moment, Charley said, "Some people's brains, maybe."

They all nodded.

A green convertible driven by a fat woman came around the bend, trailing dust, and rattled across the bridge.

"New York license plates," Luke said, squinting.

"Yep," said Charley.

"Maybe she'll bite."

"If she stops," Charley said, "maybe she will."

THE green convertible swerved off the road and pulled to a halt beside the store. The fat lady got out and looked around for a moment, blinking in the sun. She saw the three old men up on the porch and seemed to hesitate. Then she went around the back of the car and headed for the outhouse, walking a little defiantly, head up, her steps steady and deliberate.

The men exchanged glances. Luke handed Charley a dollar bill.

"Do her some good, maybe," Charley said. "Shy type."

"Like we didn't know how it was," Sam said, shaking his head.

"Or maybe," Charley said, "because we do. Funny."

Luke sat down on the bottom-most step and scuffed the dirt of the yard with a toe. They watched the cowbell atop the outhouse, and listened to the murmur of the creek, and heard a bird sing in the

big elm out back of the store, and waited.

The chain that came up through the outhouse roof yanked down.

The cowbell went *Blongle, blongle, blok!*

Charley puffed his pipe in satisfaction. Luke and Sam grinned. They waited for the fat lady to emerge.

When she did, a moment later, it was looking puzzled as usual—but there was a difference. She stalked ten feet away from the outhouse, about-faced, and stared up at the cowbell. The men saw the back of her neck get red and redder still. Then she turned and came toward the porch. Her eyes were narrowed, her hands were clenched into fists, her mouth was a determined slash.

She marched across the yard and stood facing the three men on the porch. She put her fists on her hips and glared.

Luke and Sam stopped grinning. Charley's pipe drooped.

The sun beat down on the valley, the town, the yard, the outhouse, the fat woman. Her brow was shiny with perspiration. She stood there turned her cold blue glare on one man after another, like you'd sweep a gatling against enemy ranks.

Luke said uncomfortably, "Howdy, ma'am."

"You old lechers!" said the fat woman tightly.

Charley and Luke and Sam exchanged dismayed looks.

"Now, ma'am—" Charley began.

"Don't say anything, you old lechers," the fat woman spat. "I don't want to hear your gloating, oily voices! Of all the lecherous, salacious, lascivious things to do!"

"Why," Charley said doubtfully, "I guess we're a little old to be all those things—"

"You're never too old to be evil-minded!" she snapped. "Even if your bodies are too old for unGodliness!" Her positive and indicating gaze raked them up and down, and she saw the cards which Charley held in his lap.

"Playing cards, too!" she said, her lips curling. "Well, I guess *that* follows!"

"Follows what, ma'am?" Luke asked puzzledly.

She saw the brown beer bottle resting on the box beside Charley's chair.

"*Alcohol!*" she hissed.

SHE stood glaring up at them, her breath coming fast and shallow, in a half-crouch that led Charley Mason to wonder if she planned to climb right over the porch rail and lace into them physically.

Then, as they watched in wary silence, her anger seemed to abate a little; over a period of five seconds her fists slowly unclenched, her breath slowed, she straightened.

She said in a low voice, "It's the work of the Devil. Anger is not the answer."

"The Devil, ma'am?" Charley asked.

"*He* has made you do this—it is a device to keep lewd and licentious thoughts uppermost in your minds and corrupt your immortal souls. I suppose I shouldn't blame you for listening to him . . . so *few* of us *are* able to resist his honeyed mouthings."

"Ma'am," Luke said, "I don't think you should get so excited on a hot day like this. Maybe a cold coke—"

"I'll pray," the fat lady said. "I'll pray for the Lord to undo this Devil's work. I'll pray that your souls be cleansed of the evil thoughts the Dark One has put there." Her pale blue eyes seemed a trifle fixed, and now she smiled, looking through the men who watched her worriedly. "I—I'm almost proud that I should have suffered this humiliation in order to help Him in His work—it is a small price to pay, to have been the object of your lustful thoughts, if I can save your souls

by telling the Lord what you are doing and seeing to it that He stops you!"

She gave them a pitying, sympathetic look. "You hate me now," she said, "but when you are pure you will thank me."

She turned away and walked toward her car, head bowed.

After a moment Luke got up from the steps and sank into a chair on the porch. "Does lust mean what I think it means?" he asked.

"Guess it does," Charley said.

"Well, back when I *could* lust, I wouldn't ever have lusted *her*."

They watched her get in and drive off, head still down in an attitude of prayer, eyes up so she could drive. The car reached the other end of the main street, followed the road into the trees, and vanished.

Charley stared contemplatively across the yard at his outhouse.

"Work of the Devil, huh?" he mused. "Well, now doesn't that beat all! I bet Heaven would kick that prayer right out of court!"

"No," said a firm voice. "It was heard."

THE three old men turned and saw a tall, handsome, blond young man, dressed in a neat and utterly clean white suit, standing in the center of the yard. His face

wore an expression of perfect peace and abounding love.

Actually, he wasn't *quite* standing in the yard yet. When they turned, his feet were about four feet above the ground. As they watched, he floated slowly down until he was standing straight, and tall and smiling a little.

At that moment, *timelessness* descended upon the scene—upon Charley Mason's store, the yard, the outhouse. *Timelessness* bounded the area from one edge of Charley's yard to the other, and from the road clear to the woods out back; and that *timelessness* extended downward to a perfect point at the very center of the Earth, and extended upward in a perfect cone to Heaven; and within its boundaries nothing that happened was visible to the outside world, or indeed even "happened" so far as the outside world was concerned; for it all happened in *timelessness* . . . in one of those particles of time-substance which exists *between* microseconds on Earth's time continuum: particles so small that they are of use only to angels, who in their work must often get between people and their intended deeds faster than seems possible.

The young man's calm eyes looked into the minds of the three old men on the porch, and saw no

evidence there of lewd or lascivious thoughts of the magnitude reported by the fat lady in her prayer. This did not surprise him, for exaggeration is the backbone of prayer, and the Heavenly Workers are used to it. In particular are they used to nuisances like the fat lady, who continually turn in false alarms.

Closing his eyes, the young man contacted his secretary-cherubim in his office in Heaven. The cherubim immediately returned the dossiers of Luke and Sam and Charley Mason to the Heavenly Files, with no additional notations on the debit side.

That done—for nothing is so urgent in the eyes of Heaven as the latest data on souls—the young man turned his attention to the outhouse.

He saw the cowbell, and his lips pursed.

He left the porch, walking lightly, and crossed the yard to the outhouse. The three old men watched him dreamily, unmoving, comprehending, gripped by *timelessness* and a sense of wonder.

The young man opened the crescent door and went in. The chain yanked. The cowbell went *Blongle, blongle, blok!*

The young man reappeared in the door and looked at the old men on the porch. He pursed his

lips again and shook his head reprimandingly. He disappeared again.

A second later, the cowbell and chain and angle-iron disappeared too.

THE young man came out, dusting his hands with a white handkerchief. He came back across the yard and mounted the steps. He seated himself on the porch railing, where he could face the three old men.

"Shame on you," he said.

The men cast their eyes downward.

"The lady's accusations were somewhat excessive," the young man said. "Your motives seem not to have been primarily lascivious, and I have so informed Heaven. But still . . . don't you think you should be ashamed of yourselves?" He paused. "You may nod if you wish."

The men nodded, eyes dreamy.

"After all," the young man said, "isn't that rather a snide trick to play on tired travelers who seek your hospitality?"

Charley Mason's mouth worked; his Adam's apple bobbed.

"Speak," said the young man.

"Gosh," Charley said in a low voice, "it was just a little joke. We never had nothing else in mind —"

"I know," the young man said.

"I have discounted that element. I am speaking of the unkindness of the prank—the discomfiture which you impose on its victims."

"Oh," said Charley. "I—gosh, it just embarrassed them a little bit, that's all. I mean . . . that's all, isn't it?"

"No," said the young man sternly, "there is more. Think a moment, humans, upon that common structure in the yard . . . think deeply, and you will realize that there is much more to it than meets the eye."

"Guess so," mumbled Charley.

"It is a haven . . . a place of wondrous solitude . . . a refuge for those who would contemplate without interruption, as many a weary traveler yearns for."

"Guess so."

"In what other situation can you be so completely alone . . . in a perfect isolation not only permitted but sanctioned by your society? Why, humans, I could tell you of the most extraordinary moments of piety, of philosophical reflection, of artistic conception which we have recorded as occurring under such circumstances . . ."

"I never thought of it that way, I guess," Charley said slowly. "I always did sort of think it leveled you off, though."

The young man eyed them soberly.

"In late afternoon," he said, "in the confines of the rustic outhouse, settled happily, hearing the quaint and natural sounds of the insects in the field, the flutterings of birds from branch to branch . . . do you know that in this day it is the only waking place where one may flee for the inner life?"

The old men looked down guiltily.

"It is ever a reminder of one's mortality," the young man said.

"It is Man in his true aristocratic state," he said.

"And yet at his most humble," he said.

"And now I will leave," he said. "I hope you have seen the light, and will no longer impose your crude, cruel joke on those who trust you for a moment's peace."

He stood up. "I hardly think that it was the work of the Devil, however, as the lady seemed to think—"

A cloud seemed to come over the sun—but there were no clouds, so perhaps the sun dimmed. The birds in the trees were suddenly silent. Even the rustling leaves seemed to pause. It grew still darker, and a chill breeze sprang up.

A head, whose face was dark and sharp and saturnine, appeared in the center of the yard.

AS the young man and the three old men watched, a tall, dark, gaunt man in a neatly tailored black suit rose from the ground and stood eying them mockingly.

"Wasn't it?" he said in a thin, dry voice, and laughed.

The young man's lips tightened. He said nothing. The three old men were shrunk back in their chairs, staring.

The Devil—or perhaps the man in black was only *part* of the Devil, for mysterious and complex are the ways he influences from his bronze throne in the exact center of mid-western Gehenna — turned and sauntered to the outhouse. He entered.

A moment later the cowbell and chain and angle-iron reappeared—though not quite as they had been. The chain seemed a little heavier, the cowbell a little larger and more shiny.

The chain was yanked. The cowbell went *Blongle, blongle, blok, blok!*—a metallic sound of triumph.

The man in black came out smirking. He made his way across the yard and mounted the porch steps. The young man frowned and lifted a shoulder so the fabrics of their clothing would not touch.

The man in black went to the opposite end of the porch and sat

down in a chair there. He looked out over the bridge and the murmuring creek and the trees beyond and took a pipe from a pocket. From another pocket he took a live coal, which he dropped into the pipe. He puffed, and sulphur-smell filled the air.

The young man got up, sighing and bracing his hands on his knees. He stood for a moment regarding the man in black levelly. Then he went down the steps and across the yard and into the outhouse.

Chain, cowbell and mounting vanished.

The man in black rose, still smiling. He passed the three old men, trailing sulphur smoke from his pipe. They shrank back, eyes wide. He went down into the yard and toward the outhouse.

When he was halfway there, the young man emerged. They locked eyes, the young man's cool and determined, the other's hot and mocking and quite as determined.

They passed each other, saying not a word.

As the young man reached the porch steps, there came from the outhouse a loud *Blongle, blongle, blongle, blok, blok*, and he paused, one foot on the steps, lips thinned. He seated himself deliberately, and only then did he look around.

The new bell was twice as large as the former. The chain was

heavier. It hung from a heavy cast-iron mounting.

The man in black came out. He sauntered back to the porch and seated himself.

HALF a non-existent hour passed—non-existent, because it passed in *timelessness*. The young man sat quietly, seeming to ponder; the man in black sat as quietly, smoking his sulphur; the three old men sat like mice, their eyes shuttling back and forth between the two antagonists.

At last the young man got up and walked slowly to the outhouse. The cowbell and its paraphernalia vanished. This time with a flash of white light.

The man in black dropped a new lump of smoking sulphur into his pipe and tamped it down with his thumb. He walked to the outhouse and replaced the bell with a still bigger one. He yanked at the chain, and raucous bellsound filled the yard.

He came back, and they sat around a while longer.

The young man went out. The new bell vanished with a flash like diamond-blue lightning.

The man in black sauntered out. In an enormous mounting atop the outhouse appeared a three-foot church bell.

Its chain yanked down.

Bong-g-g — bong-g-g — bong-g-g

...

The young man hurried across the yard, shoulders stiff. So quickly that the man in black, eyes mocking, was forced to stand aside at the very door of the outhouse to permit him to enter.

The church bell and mounting vanished. With a clap of indignant thunder.

The man in black resumed his chair on the porch. The young man came slowly back across the yard and sat on the steps.

After a few minutes the young man said, "That wasn't very funny."

"I hardly expected you to think so."

"This can go on for an awfully long time you know."

"I have," said the man in black, "an awfully long time. So do you."

"I think that it's rather a silly thing for you to be concerning yourself with," the young man said. "After all, it failed to incite these humans to any thoughts which could really be called sinful."

"Then it is an equally silly thing for *you* to concern yourself with, isn't it?"

"I do so because it disturbs humans at a time when they may be nearest to God."

"I concern myself for the same

reason."

A NON-EXISTENT half hour passed. The young man sat on the steps, his white suit impeccable, face thoughtful. The man in black sat and smoked and smirked. The three old men waited.

Out in the yard the outhouse stood, a battleground of good and evil. Its coat of white paint gleamed in the sun, which still stood high as a result of *timelessness*. Its red roof was a challenge. To the young man, staring moodily, the crescent in the door seemed a mocking, lopsided smile.

On the roof stood a new and larger mounting, containing a new and larger cowbell, from which hung a new and heavier chain.

Once the young man looked upward, as if for guidance.

Once he sighed and shook his head, as if discouraged.

"One of us must win," he said finally.

"Always," the man in black nodded.

"If I destroy that bell, you will replace it."

"With a bigger one."

"If you replace it, I shall destroy it."

"And then I shall replace it again."

"Do you really feel," asked the young man, "that so small a pur-

pose is worth such an effort?"

"I might ask you the same question."

"Tiny building blocks may build a great edifice."

"The removal of one may contribute to its ruin."

The creek murmured. Out in back of the store, the bird in the elm sang a hesitant note, and then was silent.

Charley Mason cleared his throat.

The man in black turned his hot, mocking gaze on Charley. Charley closed his mouth so hard his teeth clicked.

The young man said, "You need not fear him, mortal — only his temptations."

"Mister—" Charley said hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"Something sort of has me wondering."

"Yes?"

"Well—I've been watching you two go at it, and—well, it sort of looks to like like this other feller has the edge on you right down the line. I mean, like he was all confident, and you just don't know how to get around him—"

The young man nodded somberly. "I have been waiting for you to make that observation, human. It is true. Evil has only to *be* . . . has only to *exist* for its work to

be half done. It is a pit; you have only to fall into it. While to be good, you must exert yourself to climb *out* of the pit." He looked sadly at the smirking man in black. "He walks confidently, for he requires no more than your acceptance of him, your tolerance, your passivity, your apathy. How can such a dynamic imbalance threaten him? . . . he must only *be* to be strong; you must *act* to make him weak."

The young man got up and stretched his arms. He looked upward at the sky again, and seemed to be listening. He shrugged a little.

"It has been pointed out to me," he said, "that I have demonstrated sufficiently—now there are other matters to be attended to. I will destroy the bell once again . . . but mark these words well, humans: the Dark One will create another—and it, like all his creations, will be a potential for evil. Not a large evil, perhaps, in this case, nor an evil in itself by the simple fact of its existence—rather his creations represent the potential of evil *within yourselves*. After he goes, I urge that you take down the bell and throw it away . . . destroy it . . . for as you have *seen* he is powerless to prevent that. If he creates another, cast it aside also. Keep doing so. The bell is

but the symbol, the temptation: the conquest of evil can take place only in your own souls; you must *act* in the face of that temptation. The battleground is not this town, nor this yard, nor that structure, but in *yourselves*. In you is the pit; in you must be the strength and will to escape it. Do you understand?"

Three nods.

THE young man looked into their minds for the last time, to assure himself of their purity.

And in Charley Mason's mind he saw a tiny, half-hidden thought that struck him so forcibly that he almost smiled. Deep in Charley's mind, beneath all his awe and wonder at the present situation, almost on a subconscious level, Charley's sense of humor was still working—the sense of humor that had come up with the cowbell joke in the first place.

Now, in Charley's mind, was a solution for the present difficulty. Not a solution, actually; for the realities of the problem were already solved—solved in the minds of the three old men and their firm resolve to do nothing ever again that would precipitate this kind of Heavenly and Satanic tug-of-war in the arena of their souls.

But it would end this business of bell/no bell very nicely. And not

inappropriately, the young man thought. He would arrange the situation just as Charley was mentally picturing it. And seeing what Charley had in mind finally brought a smile to the young man's face.

He walked across the yard and entered the outhouse. The bell and chain and mounting vanished. This time the young man was gone from sight just a little longer than any time previously, and when he came out he looked just a tiny bit expectant.

He waved in friendly fashion at the three men on the porch and rose into the sky, faster and faster until he disappeared into the sun.

The man in black got up from his chair and knocked out his pipe on a heel—or rather, where a heel should have been, for it was now evident for the first time that he had black hooves instead of feet.

The wad of sulphur fell to the boards and smoked and stank.

"He was right, you know," he said. "The battle was in yourselves. And I suppose I've lost. I seem to be losing more and more these days . . . though I'm by no means through. I suppose if I put up another bell, you'll just take it down." He sighed and stretched his long black-clad arms wide, as the young man had done. "Well, it's been diverting. I think I *will*

put up another bell—just for the Hell of it.”

He went down the steps, across the yard, into the outhouse.

An enormous cowbell appeared on the roof—a prince of cowbells, a cowbell fit for the neck of Babe, the giant blue ox of Paul Bunyon. From it hung an inch-thick chain.

The chain yanked down, the cowbell went *BLONGLE, BLONGLE, BLOK, BLOK, BLOK!*—and Charley’s plan which the young man had arranged before leaving the confines of the outhouse became evident.

There was a loud flushing sound. A herculean flush. The walls collapsed inward with a giant roar and an enormous swoosh and a gargantuan gurgle. A moment later there was only a deep hole in the ground where the outhouse had stood. And then the sides of the hole crumbled in to form a shallow pit.

Timelessness ended.

Luke scratched his head and

stared from Sam over to Charley. “Did you two dream the same thing I did?” his voice was awed.

Sam pointed over to where the pit made a raw scar in the ground. “Weren’t no dream. Or if it was, we’re still asleep.”

Charley had a laughing glint in his eye. “We’re not asleep, and it wasn’t any dream. ‘Specially the ending.”

Luke and Sam looked at him puzzled for a moment. Then they both laughed and Charley joined them.

“Bet that flush was the damndest joke Satan ever had played on him!” Luke gasped, holding his sides.

“One *hell* of a joke, Charley,” Sam choked. “What I wouldn’t give to have seen his face!”

Charley agreed. He began to laugh even harder as he wondered if there was any soap and water down in Gehenna. He had an idea Satan might be praying for some.

THE END

FEATURED NEXT MONTH:—

THE LAUGHTER OF TOFFEE

by

CHARLES F. MYERS

The big science-fantasy event of 1954 you’ve been waiting for! A brand new hilarious novel with all the spice, adventure, and downright side-splitting entertainment that has made the TOFFEE series the most talked-about stories in science fantasy. If you like to laugh—and who doesn’t—make this a must!

OCTOBER ISSUE OF IMAGINATION ON SALE AUGUST 31st



Judy knew that transposition was the key to perpetual life. But to transpose you needed money, trickery, and a stockholder's card in—

IMMORTALITY, INC.

by

Daniel F. Galouye

WITH faltering steps, the old man lagged almost two feet behind the girl as she pulled him along the sidewalk, her firm hand maintaining a strong grip on his wrinkled, bony fingers.

"Is it much farther, Judy?" his breath came laboredly.

He was tall but gaunt, his back bent and his free hand struggling

with a cane to keep apace. Tired, pale blue eyes were mirrors of fatigue, and perspiration dotted his bare scalp.

"We're almost there," the girl said. "It's at the end of this block."

She was young, not much more than twenty, but, beside the man, her youthfulness flourished by con-



trast, until she appeared to be scarcely more than sixteen.

"It's a school," she said in excitement. "A secondary school . . . He's an athlete, Enid. An athlete!"

He quickened his pace.

She halted abruptly before a high, mesh fence and released his hand to entwine her fingers in the diamond squares of the wire. Far back on the immense lot was a four-story brick structure of academic architecture. In the foreground, two uniformed teams faced each other in fifteen-man football practice.

The ball sailed back into the out-thrust hands of a burly giant who lowered his head and crashed into the surging mass of players.

"That's him, Enid! Isn't he marvelous?"

The old man scratched his face pensively.

"He's six-feet-three. Weighs two hundred and five. And there isn't a thing wrong with him! I checked it thoroughly!" she blurted it all in one breath.

"Like him?" Enid asked interestedly, not taking his eyes from the youth.

She nodded vigorously.

His amused laughter crackled like sandpaper. "You want him?"

She nodded again.

Man-by-man the teams untan-

gled, the ball carrier rising last. His helmet had been knocked off and tousled blond hair joggled like coiled springs as he ran over to retrieve it.

"What's his name?" Enid asked, studying the player.

She told him.

Enid cleared his throat. "Jim!" he shouted. "Jim Corling!"

The youth heard and came over. He stared fleetingly at Enid, then fastened his eyes curiously on the girl.

"I'm a Stockholder," said Enid.

Jim dropped his helmet in the dust and stiffened. "You're a member of *the Corporation*?" he asked incredulously.

Enid nodded.

Judy savoring took in the athlete's rough but handsome features, his chest and shoulders which bulged even under the heavy padding.

Jim gripped the wire-mesh. "How much?" he snapped excitedly.

"Eight million," Enid said.

Jim whistled, disbelief in his youthful eyes. "You mean I'm worth eight million?"

"Maybe . . . Your health okay?"

"Perfect."

Judy stared up into his ruggedly attractive face, tried to determine whether interest outweighed growing hesitancy in the uncertain, changing lines.

"Take him, Enid!" she urged in the old man's ear.

But Enid maintained a wary reserve. "How old are you, boy?"

"Nineteen." But he gulped guiltily, "That is, I'll be nineteen next month."

Disappointment crowded the creases on Enid's forehead. He swore; grabbed the girl's hand. "Let's go!"

"But—" she began, protestingly.

"He won't do! It'll be over two years before he's of legal age!"

"But you can wait that long!" She glanced back wistfully at the player. "Where else can you find anyone like—"

"Won't do," Enid repeated determinedly.

"Wait a minute, mister," Jim shouted. "Maybe I'll be interested for only six or seven million!"

Enid shook his head. But the boy ran along the fence beside them.

"Five million?" His voice croaked.

"Not even for *one* million."

IN their quarters at the Institute, Enid lay dressed across the bed, breathing heavily, while Judy paced nervously on the thick rug.

"He would have accepted!" she said angrily.

"But I *wouldn't!*" Enid raised

himself on an elbow. "Of course I want strength! But I also want legal maturity. I don't want to have to wait around two whole years—"

"What's two years?" She demanded bitterly. "We could take a vacation, enjoy ourselves."

He lay back, closing his eyes. "You're not really interested in my welfare," he said resentfully. "It was just him. You like him and you want to live with him and to hell with me . . . isn't that it, Judy?"

Her eyes were polished sabres in a bright sun. "No, *grandpa*." She put a cruel inflection on the mocking misnomer. "It's been almost a year since I transposed. And I'm damned tired of coddling an old man who isn't good for anything except sipping warm milk and sleeping like a baby from the minute his head touches the pillow until—"

Enid's eyes, burning deep, cut her short. "I'm not going to put myself in a position where I have to wait twenty-five months before regaining legal maturity—just because the subject happens to touch off an instinct in you."

Frustrated, she spread her arms. "Then what are you going to do?"

"Make a play for Ralph Morton." He rose and walked over to the window. "I've already sounded

him out."

"The desk clerk downstairs?"

"Yes. All the Stockholders are hot on him. He's only been here a month and he's had a dozen offers."

Judy thought of the rather nice-looking young man in the lobby of the Corporation's Institute Twenty-Seven. He wasn't six-feet-three—perhaps not more than five-feet-ten. But he did have nice brown eyes and an interesting smile.

With newfound enthusiasm, she turned toward Enid. "Will he sign?"

"I think he will."

"You could use—trickery," she suggested, "and perhaps save the eight million."

"It's apparent you don't keep informed on the laws governing the Corporation," he observed sarcastically. "The Articles of Trickery were amended forty years ago—insofar as outsiders are concerned. He's not a Stockholder, so he can't legally be inveigled into transposition. It has to be an outright voluntary sale."

"Oh," she said, disappointed.

He walked over and laid a caressing hand on her firm shoulder. But she shrugged it off; went and sat in the chair by the window.

"You're getting tired of me, aren't you?" he asked, offended.

Judy turned her face away.

"So tired," he went on, "that you're almost ready to form a partnership with another man—even a non-Stockholder."

Still she didn't answer.

"Well, go ahead," he challenged.

"If you do, you'll never see another life span. You'll never make enough money to arrange for the next transposition and pay the tax and Corporation fees on it."

She felt resentment welling for his unprovoked attack. She lunged up and stood with her fists clenched. "I *could* do it!"

"I'll bet you could!" His coarse, unsteady voice was stinging in its mockery. "Sure, Judy, you'll show them. You'll prove the Stockholders were wrong a couple of centuries ago when they decided that only by pairing off into miniature cartels could they hope for sufficient earning power during any one period to finance their next transposition."

The fight left her. He was right. She was stuck with him. But she wasn't going to give up without a rebuttal.

"You're tired of transposing, aren't you? That's why you're not too eager for this one. I could tell it during the last two periods."

"I'm an old man, Judy." His trembling voice betrayed his exhaustion. "And I don't mean just

temporarily. Sometimes I think of Haven-by-The-Sea and—"

"But you can't quit now!" There was deep concern in her plea.

He laughed—a brief amused outburst that ended in a cough. "I'm not that tired. I'm going to transpose, don't worry."

"Why?" she asked misgivingly. "Why are you going to do it if you don't want to?"

He turned away from her. "Because I love you I guess."

She was relieved. "You'll feel better after it's done. I remember just before I transposed the last time I felt sorry for the girl," she lied. "But it was all different later. Now I don't even remember her name."

"It was Lelia — Lelia Sumners," he said thoughtfully. "The girl who was going to surprise her boyfriend with a fortune; triple it, and transpose again so they could get mar—"

"Yes," she interrupted impatiently. "Lelia Sumners. I remember."

She turned and surveyed herself in the full-length mirror. "Just think—only a year ago Judy was a little old woman with rheumatism and with half of her teeth missing."

The creased skin around his mouth twisted into a smile. "And now Judy's a twenty-year-old eye-ful."

"And a lonesome one at that." She pouted. "That's why I want you to hurry up and transpose, Enid."

He turned to stare absently out the window again. "I wonder if the little old woman is satisfied with her rheumatism?"

"Her rheumatism and her eight million," Judy reminded. "When are you going to get Morton's signature?"

"He still has to be convinced."

"Why is he considering selling—dazzled by the money?"

"Not entirely. Ralph Morton is in the bitter category of the rejected suitor."

"Bless them," Judy quipped. "If it weren't for them, half the Stockholders wouldn't be able to arrange transpositions."

FROM their table in the light-starved lounge of the Institute's recreation wing, Judy and Enid watched the young man tread his way through the dancing couples on the floor. His shoulders were square and his face angular. Viewing him in the soft light that touched his features, she acknowledged without reservation that he was quite as handsome as the athlete.

"'Afternoon, Mister Gerald," he said as he reached them.

"Hello, Ralph." Enid motioned

him into a chair. "You know Judy."

He smiled back at her uneasily. " 'Afternoon, ma'am."

Judy winced, but hid the reaction in an effusive smile. She was no different from other Stockholders. None of them liked being reminded of their maturity too soon after transposition.

Ralph turned back to Enid. "What did you want to see me about, Mr. Gerald?"

"Transposition," he answered bluntly.

The waiter interrupted and Ralph ordered a drink. When the man had gone, he began doodling on the tablecloth with his fingernail. "I don't know that I'm interested."

Judy watched Enid lean forward, squinting. "What's the best offer you've had?"

"Seven million."

"My offer's nine. Plus, of course, automatic membership in the Corporation. That's the only way you can get in."

Judy didn't imagine he was too impressed by the figure. At least, his meditative silence was not encouraging.

"I don't know, he said finally.

"What are the chances of making nine million in your lifetime? In nine lifetimes?" Enid asked.

Ralph shrugged. "Not much. But what good is it going to do

me if I'm sixty-five years old. That's your age, isn't it?"

Judy leaned back, opened her compact and began powdering her nose. It was beginning to seem as though getting the young man's signature wasn't going to be as easy as they had thought.

"That's right," Enid admitted. "But I still have an expectancy of at least twenty years. Anyway, you're a pretty smart lad. You might be able to arrange another quick transposition—maybe even within a year."

Enid laughed. "In other words, the nine million might buy two transpositions . . . two for the money."

"Suppose I can't find another subject?"

"That's the chance you have to take. That's why the price is in millions, not thousands."

Ralph offered Judy and Enid a cigarette. The old man declined. Then he held out his lighter for her and lit one for himself.

"You're offering me nine million." He blew a cloud of smoke on the surface of the table. "But that doesn't mean I'll wind up with that much. The government takes a big slice to start with. Then, if I want to buy a transposition for myself, I'll have to run what's left back up to about eighteen million in order to pay the subject and

meet the fifty percent Corporation fee and fifty per cent federal tax."

Judy glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. He certainly wasn't as gullible as Enid had thought.

Enid hunched his shoulders. "You've got twenty years to do it in."

The waiter brought Ralph's drink and he made small designs with his finger in the frosting on the side of the glass. "Suppose twenty years isn't enough?"

He turned to Judy. "Don't you see what I mean, ma'am? A lot of the Stockholders even have to borrow against future earning power to finance a transposition. It isn't easy to make a fortune—not any more."

"As Enid said," she answered coolly, "that's the chance you have to take. If you succeed . . . then you're an immortal too."

She lifted her glass and tipped it toward him, smiling. "And I'll be cheering for you."

"I'll do better than that," Enid offered. "I'll *help* you run your stake back up."

Judy stiffened cautiously, recognizing the incipient stage of one of Enid's "tricks." It would be a subtle one, though — one that wouldn't clash with the amended Articles of Trickery.

"The Stockholders," he went on,

"are finding it difficult to build fortunes. Two centuries ago, they could enjoy life, devoting only five or ten years to making enough money to finance their next transposition. Times got tougher; so, now we work in pairs. The next logical step in this era of tight money is to form cartels of three or more Corporation members.

"I'm going to organize the first. I've already decided that we'll need an elderly man as a front, to conceal our identity as Stockholders. How'd you like to handle the handshaking job for us?"

JUDY laughed to herself. Age hadn't dulled Enid's cunning—not in this period. She glanced at Ralph. There was a serious expression on his face. He actually *believed* Enid was entertaining such a plan.

"I don't know," he said. "I still want time to think it over. Somehow, I don't quite think it's right—this idea of buying new physical accessories for an old personality every forty or fifty years."

Enid folded his hands and smiled, waited until the orchestra finished its number. "My boy," he began glibly, "the Corporation fulfills one of man's basic desires—one that he's had since he crawled from the caves . . . immortality. Man has always wanted to live

forever, but the body has stubbornly refused to assist in the realization of that wish. The Corporation has provided the only way to hurdle the obstacle.

"The ego is the sum total of all the impressions, memories, sensations that have been collected by an individual in a lifetime. If, with the help of psychoelectronics, that ego can be transposed with one belonging to a youth, then immortality has been achieved."

"But," Ralph drew back, unconvinced, "I still don't think it's right."

"Your government does," Enid went on insistently. "There are over a hundred Institutes run by the Corporation throughout the country. They provide over fifty per cent of the federal revenue. And—"

Judy sighed audibly. "If the conversation is going to degenerate into finances and politics," she said, pouting, "I'd rather be out there." She motioned toward the polished floor. "Will you dance with me, Ralph?"

Hesitatingly, he escorted her toward the other couples.

That Enid was a cagy Stockholder could not be denied, she reflected as she followed Ralph's steps. He had sublimated the Corporation with references to basic human wishes and beneficial results to the

country.

But that wasn't the true picture. Her conception was the more correct one . . . vampires. That was it. The Stockholders were more like the beings in the ancient legend who, as the price of their immortality, sucked blood and had to keep on sucking blood, infecting their victims in turn. But it wasn't with a sense of shame that she likened herself to the mythical figures. It was with an indifference that bordered on complacency.

She tightened her grip on Ralph's back and rubbed her cheek softly against his. His arms were strong and his shoulders big. And it was delightful to be doing the things that young people did.

Judy put her lips close to his ear.

"He has to go to a meeting of the Institute's Men's Club tonight. I'll be alone."

She felt him tense.

"Any time after eight o'clock," she said.

JUDY fluttered about the apartment. She stopped in front of the wall console, waved her hand, and the soft music became almost a whisper. Whirling around winsomely, she passed her hand in front of the capacitance switch near the door of the living room and the lights dimmed from their harsh

white glow to a pale purplish-blue emanation.

Next she paused, humming, in front of a third hidden switch; flicked her hand again. The scent of lilacs haunted the room. She sniffed, frowned, and gestured once more. A vigorous breeze flooded the apartment and the lilacs were gone. Instead there was the delicate redolence of gardenias.

She stood in front of the mirror and arranged the neckline of her pale pink negligee at the precise angle which she had learned during previous periods was most alluring. Studying her reflection, she was convinced that in this period the deep V arrangement was no less seductive.

She strode sprightly toward the mirror and her shapely calves and thighs formed and melted in the silken contours of the negligee with each step. There was no denying that that girl—what was her name?—Lelia had what might be called "class" in any period.

Judy sat on the sofa and drummed her fingers on its plush armrest; she lighted a cigarette. Would Enid be angry if he knew what she was doing? She shrugged and laughed aloud. What difference would it make? There was certainly no indiscretion involved. After all, wouldn't she soon be living with the physical Ralph Mor-

ton, even though the physique would be equipped with a new name and another set of memories and impressions?

The chimes murmured daintily and she activated the capacitance switch at her fingertip. The door swung open on Ralph as he stood hesitatingly in the hall.

"I thought you would never get here," she said in her most personal voice, drawing her legs up underneath her on the sofa and extending her hand invitingly.

He stood on the threshold and peered in uncertainly. She sprang up and went over to take his hand; watched amused as he tried to keep his eyes from gravitating down to the points where her knees punched the light material of her gown.

She led him into the room, laughing. "Enid won't be back for at least three hours."

Then she curled up at one end of the sofa, but pouted as he dropped down uneasily at the other end, unable to conceal his discomfort.

"Ralph!" she admonished. "I thought you'd like to sit next to me!"

Swallowing, he moved to the center of the sofa. "Yes, ma'am."

"And don't call me ma'am!" Laughing, she caught his arm and pulled herself against him. "It sounds so—oldish." Judy looked up beaming into his face.

"I—I thought you wanted me to come over so we could talk about the transposition," he said.

"Silly," she chided. "I don't want to *talk* about anything." She let her head drop against his shoulder where her hair was close against his face. And she wondered whether she had sprayed it with just the right amount of perfume.

But when he didn't respond, she sat upright abruptly.

"I know what the trouble is," she complained, hurt. "You're thinking of me as an old woman."

He didn't answer.

JUDY let her eyelids flutter, hoping she would be able to make moisture come as she had during the last two periods. She succeeded. And she turned the moist eyes up to him.

"Do I look old, Ralph?" she pleaded. "Or do I look like a young, lonesome girl?"

The expression in his eyes deepened and she could sense his resistance being drained away.

"You—" he began.

"Kiss me, Ralph." She put her arms around his neck and drew his lips to hers.

A pleasant surprise greeted her. Where she had expected his reluctance, instead he was kissing her—*really* kissing her!

But suddenly he pulled free and

removed her arms, stood up.

With eyes dreamily half closed, she leaned back against the sofa so he could see the full whiteness of her slender neck. "Do I *act* like I'm — old, Ralph?"

But the momentary enchantment had been broken. She realized that when he nervously lit a cigarette.

Abruptly, she sat erect and folded her arms; staring up sternly, resentfully. "What *did* you come here for?" she clipped.

"Like I said," he explained, looking away in embarrassment, "I thought you wanted to talk about the transposition and I wanted to get your advice."

Determinedly, Judy rose and stood before him; she caught his face gently between two soft, white hands. But before she could press her body against his, she recognized the expression in his eyes and backed away almost horrified.

It was an expression she had not wanted to find there—affection! And that, she realized apprehensively, was the worst possible development! She wanted him to be infatuated, but he *mustn't* fall in love! If he did, he would never consent to sacrificing her through a transposition with Enid!

She turned away coldly.

"Judy, he whispered, touching her shoulder. There was a tender anxiety in his voice, but she twist-

ed tactfully away from him.

What a fool she had been in her selfish eagerness! If she didn't rectify her mistake she might ruin everything. But she could think of no way out of the predicament.

"You—you'd better leave," she blurted in a school-girlish tone which she hadn't used in centuries.

The responding appreciation in his eyes told her she had only worsened matters; had created the impression that she might, after all, be *modest*. That he had been searching for such a quality in her was written in the sudden admiration that appeared on his face.

Afraid to take any more chances, she skirted the room, waving her hand. The music welled; the lights surged to almost daylight brilliancy; the gardenias went and in their place was a vacuous absence of fragrance; the door swung open.

"I—have a headache." She groped for an excuse to extricate herself as she pulled the negligee tightly about her. "Please go."

He sighed, turned and went out the door. In the hall, he looked back. "I—I hope I didn't do anything to—"

She eased the door closed in his face cutting off his voice.

ENID gulped two pills from a bottle. Then he drew the muf-

fler tight about his neck and leaned back in the soft chair by the open window to let the mid-morning sunlight bring its extra measure of warmth.

Judy glanced at him and returned to her reading—but only for a moment. Impulsively, she dropped the book on the end table and lit a cigarette. ,

"Nervous this morning, aren't we?" Enid pried.

She picked up the book again, tried to find her place.

"I haven't seen you that unsettled since before you transposed with that Lelia Sumners," he pressed. "I hope it isn't anything physical."

Irritably, she dropped the book again, stubbed out her cigarette and rose. "Did you see Morton this morning?"

Enid nodded.

"Did you get his name on an agreement to sell?"

"I did not; and I'm not so sure that I will. As a matter of fact, he seems less interested now than before."

She went over to the console and absently tuned in a musical program. Had it happened? Had Ralph already become so Platonically fond of her that he scorned a transposition?

"Offer him more," Judy suggested.

"I did—another million. It didn't seem to impress him very much."

She went back to the end table and fished for another cigarette. The pack was empty. She crumpled it and hurled it across the room.

"All right, Judy," Enid said consolingly but authoritatively, "what's wrong?"

"Nothing," she almost shouted.

He rose and came over to her. "I've lived with you long enough to know all your moods. And eventually I'll find out the reason for this one. Hadn't you better tell me about it?"

She stared indifferently at him.

"Another affair?" he tried.

Judy sighed and spread her arms helplessly. "I think I loused up our deal with Morton."

He frowned, waiting.

"He was up here last night. It might have been another affair—I don't know. But—"

"But he fell in love with you and that's why he's not interested in signing for a transposition?"

She lowered her head guiltily.

"I surmised as much," he said thoughtfully. "And I planned accordingly."

She looked up, puzzled. "You mean there might still be a—a way?"

He nodded, rubbing his hands to-

gether smugly. "The Articles of Trickery," he explained, going back to his chair, "insure against financial fraud on a non-Corporation Stockholder. But there are no provisions against tricking a non-member into a transposition with the intent of paying. So, we'll try it this way—"

As he began outlining the plan, she smiled. And the further he advanced it, the more effusive was her smile. When he had finished she was grateful that she was associated with Enid. Certainly there were few Stockholders in any of the Corporation's Institutes who were as shrewd.

"**I** HAD to see you Ralph," she said as he came up to her table in a darkened corner of the lounge.

He shifted the chair closer to her before he sat. "Is it about the transposition?" he asked.

She detected the bitterness in his voice. "Generally, yes," she answered, letting her hand fall tenderly on his wrist.

"Tell Enid I'm not interested." He pulled his arm away.

"I'm not here to try to talk you into it, Ralph." Judy let her eyes drop to the table. "Although Enid thinks I am."

He drew alertly erect in the chair.

"I love you, Ralph."

He started.

"Didn't you suspect that?" She let her voice fall to a whisper, as though she were hurt. "I tried last night. But I was wrong. I realized that before you were in the room ten minutes. And I was ashamed. I thought you would want someone—vital. So I had to act vital. But you're not that way—and I was so happy about it that I cried after you left."

He cocked an eyebrow dubiously.

But she parried his skepticism. "Tell me that the way you were last night is the true Ralph Morton," she pleaded, hoping she wasn't laying it on too heavily. "I'd be so disillusioned if I found out differently!"

She forced moisture into her eyes and grasped his hand. This time he did not pull away.

"You came last night because you love me." It was a hopeful statement, not a question. "That's the truth, isn't it, Ralph?"

He stared intently into her face, but didn't answer.

She closed her eyes grievously. "I know what it is. You think I'm second hand. You think I've been someone else's for generations—maybe even hundreds of years . . . Well, that's not true. Except for the thoughts and memories I have, I'm only an innocent girl whose

name used to be Lelia Sumners. Try to think of it that way, Ralph. Try to think of me as the girl Lelia Sumners who changed her name . . . Can you do it?"

His shield fell like a curtain. He leaned forward and kissed her on the cheeks, on her forehead, on her lips.

It would be simple now. The doubtful part was over—reassuring herself that he actually loved her. Now there were only the details.

She sighed deeply, looking despairingly. "Oh, I've been so desperate for so many years — wanting to be through with the Corporation, yet not being able to find anything better. But now I *have* something better . . . someone who makes me want to forget about this place; about the endless quest for money to finance an endless series of transpositions so there would be enough time to make more money for more transpositions."

"But Judy," he said, concerned, "will you be happy with me? Maybe you won't find life as exciting. And I have no right to expect you to throw a glamorous life aside and live on a shameful salary!"

She brightened. "We don't have to pass up the money, Ralph! There's a way. You'll *get* your ten million!"

He frowned. "Only if I transpose with Enid," he reminded.

"You can *pretend* to transpose."

He tensed. "A trick?"

She nodded, cautiously studying his face for the reaction.

"I—I don't know," he said hesitatingly. "It—it's criminal."

"It's the only way, Ralph," she said earnestly. "I've got to have at least three million."

JUDY loaded her voice with desperation. This was the critical scene. If she could play it convincingly, there would be no more hurdles.

"You see, I'm in debt to the Corporation. I had to borrow for my last transposition. If I don't settle the obligation, they can force me to transpose with some shriveled up old woman Stockholder who's in the market. That'll be the only way I can satisfy the debt."

"I don't know, Judy." His forehead was a maze of troubled furrows. "What about—Enid?"

"He's tired, Ralph. He doesn't want to transpose any more. He won't tell me that, of course. But I know it. He'd be so much happier if he could turn in his card and move to Haven-by-The-Sea, the refuge for Stockholders who retire from the Corporation."

He blinked his eyes thoughtfully.

"You *do* love me?" she asked.

He nodded. But he was obvious-

ly still deep in concentration.

"When Enid finds that he's been tricked," she went on less somberly, "he'll probably even be amused. He's a devil. He's often spoken jokingly about being the victim of a trick some day. Lord knows he's tricked enough in his days — and non-Corporation members too, before it was illegal."

He turned attentively toward her. And she was sure that the only half-true insight she had given into Enid's character provided the justification Ralph had been seeking.

"The three of us," she explained rapidly, "will go to the Transpositor Unit together. I will be the attendant—any Corporation member is qualified. After you get in your booth Enid and I will set your controls. But after he and I leave to go to his booth, you'll reset them like I show you. The process induces hypnosis, so Enid won't be aware of what I do in his booth after the transfer gets under way.

"We'll adjust both controls so there'll be only a partial transfer of ego—from Enid to you. You'll acquire enough of his memories and impressions, while you retain your own, to be able to convincingly impersonate him. When it's over with, I'll verify that the transposition was effected. If he protests to the Corporation, you'll have

enough of his memory to prove you are Enid. And we'll both expose him as the imposter."

Silently, Ralph mulled over the plan.

"By announcing the intrigue later," she went on, "we could qualify for the Trickery bonus. But I don't want that. I only want enough money to buy my way out of the Corporation."

Finally, he nodded.

"The ten million bank note," Judy continued, "will be in Enid's pocket when he enters his booth. That's the way payment is made—the money stays with the physical person, but ownership changes as the ego is transposed. I'll take it from him while he's unconscious and place it in your pocket."

Still he offered no protests. After all, she reasoned, anyone would realize that ten million is ten million.

"Let's go down to the Transpositor Unit. It'll take two or three sessions to show you how it works and how you'll have to reset the circuits after Enid and I set them."

IMPATIENTLY, Judy stared out the cab's window as it wheeled through the heavy traffic.

She glanced at Enid. "You have the money?"

"Now, Judy," he said reproach-

fully, "you were with me when I drew out the bank note a half-hour ago. You know I have it."

"But you may have lost it," she snapped moodily.

Sighing, he withdrew it from his pocket.

When she saw the certificate she was relieved. But only for a moment. Then her hands were clenched together. "I hope nothing will go wrong!"

He smiled reassuringly. "Nothing will—not if you do everything as I told you . . . By two o'clock it will all be over. There isn't much that can happen in one hour."

"But he wants me to go over the routine with the Transpositor Unit again so he won't make any mistakes."

"When?"

"At one-thirty. That's why I'm in a hurry to get back to the Institute."

"By all means do it with him. We don't want him getting suspicious at the last minute. I'll delay my arrival at the Unit so you will have plenty of time."

The driver turned a corner and headed toward the impressive building four blocks away.

Enid was silent for a moment. Then, "You're sure you know what to do?"

"Before we activate his stall,"

she recited, "we let him set his controls for a reverse, one-way transfer. As soon as he's unconscious I go back in and reset them for a normal complementary transposition . . . I hope it works out as simple as it sounds."

But before she had finished the review he began laughing, almost inaudibly.

"What's the matter?" she asked, frowning.

"It just occurred to me that this could very easily be a trick all right—but *on me*. Couldn't it, Judy?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Under hypnosis," he went on, "Morton and I will both be helpless. You could go through with the intrigue . . . just as you explained it to him, letting him receive just enough of my memory to be able to impersonate me and—"

Judy's face brightened, then she laughed. "You don't give me credit for much intelligence. Ralph Morton?—I'll take him—physically. But if he's stupid enough to fall for this ruse, I know he would never be able to compete in business and run up a large enough fortune to finance another transposition for him and me."

Enid nodded thoughtfully, apparently reassured.

The cab, in the slow moving traffic, was only two blocks away from the Institute now.

Enid looked down into his palms. "How long does it go on, Judy?" he asked, meditatively.

"What?"

"This business of pseudo-immortality? Where does it get us? Are we fooling ourselves into believing that we can keep it up indefinitely when we know that sooner or later all Stockholders voluntarily end up at Haven-by-The-Sea? I wonder when we're going to get tired of it—I mean *really* tired."

She casually straightened his tie and brushed a length of lint off his lapel. "You'll feel different after transposition," she encouraged. "We all get that 'what's-the-use' attitude toward the end of each period. That's why I'm always saying, 'Let's transpose earlier this time'."

She leaned back and stared ahead.

"Judy—"

"Yes, Enid?"

He didn't answer. When she looked, his eyes seemed to be very tired and his thin shoulders sagged more than ever. But he was not looking into her face.

"I love you, Judy."

A minute later the cab drew up in front of the Institute and Judy went up the steps ahead of Enid, brushing aside an elderly woman in her eagerness to get to the Transpositor Unit in the basement.

"I'll see you down there at two o'clock," she called back over her shoulder.

IN the subsurface level, she walked rapidly down the corridor toward the Unit vault. From ahead came the voices of Ralph and a guard.

"But I don't have a Stockholder's card," Ralph was saying.

"Sorry," the guard gruffed, standing firmly between him and the door, "Nobody but Corporation members get in."

"But I'm going to transpose and —"

"After you transpose you can get your membership certificate any time you want. But you don't get in now."

Judy reached them. "He's with me," she explained, showing her card.

The guard stepped aside, allowing them to enter.

Inside, Ralph stopped in front of the main Transpositor apparatus, which was flanked by twin, glass-front booths, each equipped, with its individual battery of switches and dials mounted on a control panel suspended over a plain cot.

"Are you *sure* it will work, Judy?" He gripped her shoulders and there was intense concern in his stare.

She smiled and kissed him on the cheek. "Of course it will, darling. There's nothing that can go wrong."

She took his hand and led him into the stall on the left, stooped at the side of the cot to point up at the face of the panel. "This is how the circuits should be set for complimentary transposition. Enid will check to see that the controls are in those positions . . . Now, let's see how you are going to reset them after he and I leave to go over to his booth."

Hesitatingly, he snapped three switches.

"That's right," she encouraged. "And, what else?"

He flipped two more levers and carefully twisted three dials.

"Fine!" she exclaimed.

He rose.

"The timer!" she corrected. "You forgot the timer! It's set for a full ten-minute transfer. Forty seconds will be sufficient."

He nodded abruptly; reset the final rheostat.

"See?" she wrinkled her nose, smiling. "There's nothing to it." Then she rearranged the controls as they were. "Now all we have to do is wait for Enid and act impersonal toward each other when he gets here."

He turned to face her, his face grim, his hands trembling as he

reached out to grasp her arms. "Judy . . . I—I want a demonstration."

She started. "But why, Ralph?"

He shook his head disconsolately; made no attempt to hide his anxiety. "I love you, Judy. But I've got to know that this isn't a trick! I'm sorry you have to learn that I doubt you, darling. But, don't you see? Suspicion toward Stockholders is natural. They are notorious for the tricks they used to pull off."

SHE let herself appear pained for a moment. Then, soberly she said, "But you know the law! It's illegal to trick a non-Stockholder."

He spread his hands. "But there's always the chance that some member will find a way around the law. That's why I've got to find out. It doesn't mean I love you any less."

Expressionlessly, she nodded. "I think I can understand. What do you want me to do? There isn't much time. Enid will be here in ten minutes."

"We're going to set the Transpositor for a one-way partial transfer. All I want is a split-second glimpse into the impressions you've received over the past two or three days—the memories you retained of what has happened. Then I'll see for myself that you haven't been

—plotting with Enid."

With an intense effort, she denied expression to the smile that fought to claim her face. "All right, Ralph," she said calmly. "But the hypnosis will last for at least five minutes, no matter how brief the exposure to transposition. So we can't waste any time."

As she turned her back to set the controls, she allowed the smile a momentary expression . . . Only Stockholders—only people who had transposed a sufficient number of times to be thoroughly familiar with the process—knew that for brief periods volition could still be exercised despite the overpowering forces of the transpositors. Through concentration before and during the split-second exposure to the transferring currents, she would be able to effect a basic alteration in her pertinent thoughts.

He would receive her impressions all right—but they would be imaginary misrepresentations of her real attitude toward him; false accounts of her actions over the past several days that involved him.

Together, they went to the other booth and set the circuits on her control panel for the brief transfer. After he had returned to his stall, she spoke into the oral communicator at the side of her cot.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

She reached up from where she lay and punched the activating button.

And in the infinitely brief moment that preceded unconsciousness, her thoughts seemed inexplicably to go back to her recent entry into the building—to her dash up the steps.

There had been an elderly woman entering at the same time—an elderly woman who tried to turn her face. Why? So she wouldn't be recognized?

In retrospect, the recognition that had failed Judy then was hers now. The face, the tired body—she had viewed them many times . . . in every mirror into which she had looked before her last transposition. She wanted to be alarmed. But complete unconsciousness came too quickly, smothering the welling consternation.

JUDY awoke screaming. It was a feeble, throaty scream that reverberated dully within the confines of the soundproof stall. But it gained strength when she opened her eyes and verified that she was not in the booth which she had entered, but in the complimentary one!

She raised her arms to push the suspended control panel from its position over the cot. But the hands were wrinkled, mottled, bent

crazily at their arthritic joints.

Trying to rise from the cot, she fell back breathing heavily, exhausted. And she cringed as she stared at a dozen horrifying reflections of her face in the shining glass dials of the pendant console.

Finally she threw her legs off the side of the cot and rose trembling on painfully weak knees. Then she noticed one of her hands clutched a stiff plastoid card which bore a photograph of the face that had stared back at her from the mirror-like dials.

"This Certifies," the bold printing read, *"That The Undersigned Is A Qualified Stockholder in Immortality, Inc."*

With quivering lips she spelled out the signature, "Lelia Sumners."

Judy staggered to the door; managed to inch it open before she collapsed on the floor, unable to revive her mastery of co-ordination over the physical form which she had abandoned a year ago.

Voices. She raised her head and looked out of the booth.

Ralph stood with his back to the main Transpositor Unit, reproach on his face.

" . . . damned lucky!" he was saying, shaking his finger beratingly in front of him. "We might never have been able to pull it off!"

"But I knew we would succeed, Ralph." The origin of the voice was out of Judy's line of vision. "I knew you'd find a way when you learned all of the eight million was gone."

Judy lay dumfounded on the floor. Now she could see the young, beautiful girl who stood in front of Ralph.

The girl gasped suddenly.

"What is it, Lelia?" he asked.

"The bonus! This makes us eligible for the Trickery bonus! All I have to do is get my membership card back from her and—"

Ralph started and swore angrily. Then he grasped her wrist and backed up until he intentionally fell sitting on the rounded generator housing of the Unit. Baring his teeth in vindictiveness, he upended her across his knees. The sound of his palm striking Lelia's plumpest region was a staccato beat in the metal-walled room.

When he released her, she pouted—but only for a second. Then she was smiling and her arms were about him as she kissed him.

They left.

A moment later, Judy heard someone else break into the room.

"Judy! Judy!" Enid shouted excitedly as he ran toward the Unit.

"Enid!" she rasped. "Over here, Enid!"

He raced to the stall; pulled the door open, and jolted.

"Judy?—*Judy!*" Frowning in bewilderment, he helped her up.

"They—they *tricked* us, Enid! Morton and that Sumners girl!" Then she began crying.

"I know. I passed them in the corridor. When I tried to talk with them they raced away. I knew something was wrong."

"But what'll we do?" she demanded frantically.

He held her chin up and grinned encouragingly. "It's not all that bad. At least, there's still Haven-by-The-Sea."

Numbly, she let him lead her toward the vault's exit.

"Enid!" She stopped suddenly, her wrinkled hands grasping his thin arms. "You have money! You've got over ten million! And you don't really want to trans- pose! Give it to me, Enid! Let me—"

He lowered his head regretfully. "It's gone," he said. "The arrangement was for me to leave it in an envelope in one of the combination lockers in the lobby. That was the only way he would go through with the deal."

"You fool!" Judy exclaimed. "Now we don't have anything!"

"Except each other," he corrected. And there was a special tenderness in the pressure of his arm

about her waist as they continued toward the door. "Each other and almost twelve thousand. Enough for a vacation before we go out to the Haven."

But she did not see his other hand as it slipped the ten million

bank note from his pocket and dropped it into the ventilation slot of the generator housing where the next activation of the Transpositor would pulverize it.

THE END

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR



Jerome Bixby



(Concluded from Page 2)

(had a stomach to support)—but now the bug is starting to bite again: am sketching an orchestral work.

Have worked as: soda jerk, office boy, lathe hand—(break here for military service: Air Corps, last war) — record salesman, insurance investigator, pianist in a dance band, portrait sculptor, freelance cartoonist, and recently (since '49) as a stf editor on and off. The ons have included *Planet*, *TWS*, *Startling*, *Galaxy* and *Beyond*; during the offs I've free-lanced. Five wonderful years . . . I only hope the next five are half as much fun.

Likes: cats (her name is Engram), Beethoven, bittersweet chocolate, Prokofieff, Adlai Stevenson, summer, and disputatious sophistry.

Dislikes: overexuberant dogs, liver, 99% of all popular music,

the advertising racket, mobiles, coffee that isn't quite sweet enough, and big fat cars with chromium smiles.

Am 5' 10", weigh about 135, and have muscles only in my fingers. I am content as I review the list to those who like and dislike me. I write my stories in a 4' by 4' closet, because I grind my Royal at night and sleep days when I hit a writing streak, and people who aren't crazy like to sleep at night . . . a man banged on the door and told me so.

I'm glad to be alive, and in this country. I would, however, happily employ time-travel, catalepsy, deep freeze, transposition of souls or any other workable device in order to escape the childswarm of *not-quite-yets* and *just-around-the-corners* (and the goofball demands) of this gestating century.

—Jerome Bixby



by Allyn Donnelson

A civilian like me has no business getting mixed up in top secret government projects. But this one I got into — and you should be as lucky!

President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

I don't know who else to appeal to about the fix I'm in, because I'm afraid I would be revealing top secret material to someone who isn't entitled to hear it. That's why I wouldn't tell the FBI anything and that's why I told them I don't want a lawyer.

I know you've got lots on your mind, Mr. President, and I hope hearing about my blunder doesn't throw you off your game this week-end or anything like that, but I sure would appreciate it if you could find time to help me out.

You see, I'm not a spy, and I sure didn't stumble into this stuff of my own accord, but how was I to know I was setting off a spark that had something to do with space travel? After all, when you stop to think about it, I only did what the foreman told me to, but he didn't know any better either, so

I wouldn't want to get him in Dutch.

You see, I work at the Diversified Metal Products Co. up here in Chicago. I'm a spot welder and one job I had to do about every six weeks was make six welds on a geedunk we called a "manhole cover." We didn't know what they were, except that they were something special for the Signal Corps, and they looked about as much like manhole covers as anything else.

Well, the way the work is supposed to be scheduled, my welding job is the first thing after it comes off the presses, just before the little coils are put in. So the foreman comes over to me one night—it was October 10, the last day of the World Series—and shows me one of the covers after it's been wired up. One of the welds has come loose—maybe because the material was dirty or something like that—and it looks like the whole thing will have to be scrapped.

So he says to me "Tuck" (my name is Joe Peters, but they call

me Tuck for Kentucky where I come from)—he says, "Tuck, do you suppose you can save this piece by welding it again, right there between those two coils?"

I look the geedunk over, and there isn't much room to play around, but I decide it's not near enough the coils to melt the wires. So if I spoil it, so what? It'd be scrap anyhow. How was I to know the points of the welder would establish an electrical contact?

So I take the piece and tell him I'll try it after I finish the truckload of stuff I'm working on. But along about coffee time, I go and burn my hand kind of bad on the welder, and have to get the nurse to bandage it up for me, and that slows me up a good bit.

Everybody else in the department had left for washup by the time I put the gismo in the machine. I kicked the pedal just like I always do, and whoosh! I was out like a rookie the first time he faces Allie Reynolds. Seems like I saw a flash of bluish-greenish light, but I don't know for sure.

Next thing I knew, a squatty guy with broad shoulders and bushy eyebrows was standing over me. He said, "Well, did the Yankees win the Series?" and his accent sounded like he should be following the Dodgers instead.

I looked around. It was kinda dark, like just after the sun goes down. I was sitting on a big strip of limestone, and I could see a few trees and some small hills, and lots more of those limestone rocks, or cliffs. It wasn't like any part of the country I've ever seen before.

The guy starts giving me the once over, too. "What monkey in that zoo they call the Pentagon picked *you* for a job like this? I knew the Defense Department was hard up, but I didn't think they were *that* hard up!"

Then I notice this geezer has a uniform sporting top sergeant's stripes. I jump up and back away from him.

"Look," I says, "I don't know what happened, but I know I didn't volunteer for no army job, and I'm too old to be drafted again. I must have had amnesia. I wanna lawyer. Lemmee out of here—you're not giving me that army routine again—no siree."

(Mr. President, please don't misunderstand me. I'm as patriotic as the next guy, and I assure you I won't shirk no duty if I'm needed, but I don't have to *like* it, do I?)

The guy's dumbfounded. He doesn't give me a strong-arm deal like I'd expect from a top-sarge—he just looks as if he can't figure it out. Then he grabs me by the shoulder.

"Wait a minute, Mac, let's sit down and talk this over. Who the hell are you? Where did you come from? Who sent you?"

I'm about to say "Groucho sent me," but I decide maybe I'd better be serious. I tell him my name, and that I ain't got the faintest idea where I am.

"Okay, Tuck," he says. "They call me Yogi. Now let's take it from the beginning, slow and easy, huh?"

So I tell him what happened in the plant, and before I get done Yogi is laughing like crazy, in fact he sits down on the rock and almost knocks himself out.

"Well, what in Sam Hill is so all-fired funny? Who kidnapped me while I was knocked out and dumped me on this God-forsaken army post?"

Yogi manages to stop laughing. He takes me across a strip of this funny-looking, bare limestone rock, where a contraption is standing that looks like a radio tower about ten feet high. Inside it is a box about the size and shape of those reducing cabinets you see in cartoons. The top to the box is open, and Yogi points to it.

"Is this the kind of doohicky you're talking about—what you call a manhole cover?"

I look close, and sure enough, that's just what it is. I nod to Yogi,

and he sighs real serious like.

"Well, Tuck, my boy, you maybe made yourself famous tonight. One thing for sure—you're the first civilian to travel by HHF, and the first one to set foot on Lunette."

"And where on God's green earth is Lunette?"

"That's what's so funny, Tuck. It's not on God's green earth at all. Lunette is a satellite of the Earth, discovered just a few months ago. It's a sort of little moon—that's why we named it Lunette. It's got enough atmosphere so we don't need space suits, and it's about half-way between Earth and the moon."

I guess I was giving him a "tell me another" look. He pointed in back of me. "Look at the moon coming up over there, if you don't believe me. Did you ever see anything like that on Earth?"

That convinced me. The old moon was huge, and I could see mountains and rivers and seas on it, and even that natural bridge I'd read about. Besides, I could even see the curve of the ground on Lunette!

But how in blazes did I get here?

"This contraption," Yogi explains, "we call a Matter BARS, short for Matter Broadcasting and Receiving Station. It works on HHF—hyper high frequency—and

instead of sending out the ordinary type of radio wave lengths it broadcasts matter. It won't work between two points on Earth; it has to have a distance of at least 200,000 miles to bounce from. We bounce stuff off the moon, and broadcast people, equipment—anything of less than 250 pounds—between Earth and Lunette."

"Who bounces them? Who in tarnation bounced me here?"

"You bounced yourself, friend. Your spotweld machine set up a contact here between these two coils. Our regular operators establish contact by moving these two balls near each other like a Leyden jar. Your machine had the same effect, and whoosh, here you are."

"Look, Bud, I remember a Leyden jar from high school science, but durned if I follow the rest of that malarky."

Yogi's getting impatient with me. "It's very simple, Peters. Suppose you wandered into a TV studio when the circuits were open—your picture and voice would be broadcast over that station. Well, that Matter BARS cover was set at the right frequency for sending objects or people to Lunette and you were broadcast here. You wouldn't have been knocked out if you had been inside the insulating cabinet; it would have just felt like a sneeze."

"So what are you doing here?" This guy is selling me fast.

"Guess I'd probably better let the CO talk to you about that. But first tell me about the Series."

So we bat the breeze a while about what is going on back on Earth, and I start to wonder how am I going to get back there. Yogi tells me to let the CO worry about that, and in the meantime offers to show me around the joint.

There's not much to see on Lunette—nothing but salt water lakes, limestone cliffs, a few scrawny trees, and some weird bushes with round things dangling from them that you'd think was grapefruit, or something like that, until you found out they were hard as coconuts.

All of the plant life looked like the chlorophyl people had been there already, and had taken a big haul back to their toothpaste factories. The grass and leaves were either a kind of chartreuse or a pale color like weak orangeade. Finally we take off for the CO.

The Captain turned out to be a right guy, but he sure was upset about the security angle. He couldn't help grinning, though, when Yogi said,

"I still think it's damned funny that a civilian could stumble into a top secret army base 100,000

miles from home!"

"Well, Peters," the Captain said, "we can't very well send you back tonight anyway, because both the regular station and the test station at your plant in Chicago are closed now. Under ordinary circumstances I'd have to lock you up, but I don't see how you can escape from us! Go bunk with Yogi and let me think it over."

He stopped us as we started out of the tent. "And men, keep your lips buttoned."

We join the fellows and talked about baseball for a couple hours. We organized a game for the next day, and I agreed to play shortstop, even though I'm hoping I won't be around for it. The Captain's remarks hadn't made me feel too easy on that score.

I ask Yogi how come all the bicycles over by the pueblo castle and he explains that they can be broadcast, unassembled, where the parts to a jeep or any other big vehicle would be too heavy for the Matter BARS to handle. He says they're used by the crews assigned to surveying and mapping Lunette, making geological and botannical surveys, and that sort of thing.

Yogi gets me a sleeping bag and we stretch out under the stars in front of the limestone castle. (Man, that thing is pretty in the moonlight, Mr. President.) Lanterns

hanging in some of the caves made it sparkle here and there like a giant hunk of jewelry. And I never breathed such fresh, sweet air as that, anyplace.

The next day the CO calls Yogi in for a conference that doesn't include me, so I get in on the baseball game after all. It was a lot of fun, too. Lunette's gravity is much less than of Earth so I made some pretty wild throws until I got oriented.

At chow time I latched onto Yogi. "Hey, kid, when do I get out of here? This is a fine adventure, but after all, I got obligations back on Earth."

"It may not be that easy. Tuck. The Captain doesn't know what to do. HQ is going to bust a gasket when they find out about you. After all, the Captain is the only one who has made any trips back since we got here, and the project is so secret that not more than 20 people on Earth have any inkling of it."

I began to flip my lid. "Yogi," I said, "how much does this project cost?"

"Plenty, Tuck, more than you'd imagine. The equipment the guys use for their surveys is pretty high-powered stuff. Why?"

"Because it's coming out of my pocket, that's why. And me and a lot of my buddies who are paying

the freight on these deals are getting sick of hearing that only two or three or twenty people in the whole USA knows about this or that secret project. Security is okay, but don't you think we ought to know something about what our money's going for?"

Boy, am I a genius at putting my foot in it! The lighter gravity on Lunette must of gone to my head. Yogi gave me a real funny look, got up from the mess table, and walked off.

I started to sweat. What the heck made me blow off like that? Now they really would think I was a security risk, and maybe they'd decide not to let me go back at all, at least not until they had a court-martial or something. Naturally I have plenty of respect for military secrets; it's just that I think voters should have a little more information and a little more say-so about how our money is spent. It's a sore point with me. But what a stupid time I pick to sound off about it!

A soldier comes along and tells me the CO wants to see me. Now I know this is it.

But Yogi and the Captain both looked as friendly as ever. "Peters," the CO said, "I think you can be useful to us."

Oh, oh, here it comes. They're going to try to talk me into stay-

ing up here.

"I suppose you have figured out by now what the Lunette Project is all about," the Captain went on. "You remember stories in the papers a few years ago on the possibility of creating an artificial satellite to use as a base for guided missiles in case of war?"

I nodded.

"The stories were hushed up pretty fast, and the reason was that Lunette was discovered just about then. They stopped talking about it just as they stopped talking about atomic research after the Manhattan project started."

"Listen, Captain, please," I said. "Beg pardon for interrupting, but please don't tell me anything a civilian isn't supposed to know, because—no offense—I don't want to get roped into the Army just because I know too much."

"No offense to *you*, Peters—I'm not trying to get you into the Army." He grinned, and I felt a lot better. "Let me go on. Yogi tells me that he explained to you something about the Matter BARS. Did you understand it?"

"Pretty well, sir. He should have been a teacher if he could make me see a glimmer of light in that stuff."

The Captain laughed and Yogi got red.

"He was. Assistant Professor of Electronics at Columbia, before the

Signal Corps persuaded him to become a Space Cadet."

My face was red then.

"Well, on the military nature of our mission we have just a few more wrinkles to iron out," the Captain went on, "but something else has come up that we think has a lot more significance than guided missiles."

"I told the Captain I thought you'd help us," Yogi said, "because of what you said about secret projects a while ago."

Now I *am* confused. So I don't like so much secrecy, so they think I can help their project? I don't get it. I don't get it at all.

"Yogi will explain the science part," the Captain said. "I'm just a publicity man myself, not a teacher. But as a publicity man, Peters, I think we can use you. Would you be game to try a job that could be very important?"

I nodded, still confused but willing.

Yogi started by explaining that Lunette came into existence about a hundred million years ago, a figure the geologists came up with by measuring the radioactivity of the uranium here and comparing it with that of uranium on Earth.

"But, in studying the radioactivity of the elements here," he said, "we have discovered something else . . . something that could

change the whole picture of things back on Earth. We found out about it, at least a glimmer of it, almost as soon as we got up here, but we wanted to run a whole slew of experiments before we let ourselves believe that it was true.

"Say, Tuck, what's that bandage on your hand for?"

I was surprised at his sudden change of subject, but I told him how I had burned my hand on the spotweld machine the night before.

"Does it hurt now?"

"Heck, it ain't nothing, Yogi. Let's get on with my physics lesson."

"Do me a favor, please. Take off the bandage."

He was real serious, so I unwound the bandage the nurse put on. There was just a tiny white scar where the burn had been. It looked like I had done it at least a couple of weeks ago!

Yogi and the Captain looked at each other and grinned like they were real proud of something.

"That's part of the lesson, Tuck. Our big discovery is that the increased radioactivity of the elements here on Lunette seems to have a miraculous healing power on any infectious or communicable disease, and on any injury to body tissues. Maybe you remember read-

ing a little about the strange effect that the Bikini tests had on some of the animals used experimentally."

I nodded.

Yogi continued. "We don't know yet just how this radioactivity works on the body. In fact, we're not even sure it is the radioactivity alone. There may be some added effect from the Lunette climate or water. But we have proved, to the satisfaction of everyone here, that almost all Earth diseases and most injuries can be cured on Lunette.

"The mess sergeant had a trick knee when he came here. The trouble disappeared completely when we arrived. One of the geologists had an ulcer. Hasn't felt a pain since the second day. Another guy had some bad powder burns from a lab experiment that disappeared over night, just like your burn did.

"When we first suspected what was going on, we asked the crew at Silver Spring to send up white rats, guinea pigs, and dogs, with everything from cancer and T.B. through rabies to polio, and the results were one hundred per cent perfect, with complete recovery in every case inside of a week. *And*, this is important, they stayed cured when sent back to Earth."

Yogi's eyes were burning like one

of them gospel preachers at a revival, and his voice was shaking. I was catching the excitement myself. The Captain took over the story.

"I suppose you're wondering what we want of you?"

"I sure am. This is a big deal, isn't it?" I looked at the little scar on my hand again, to convince myself nobody was kidding.

"Here's our problem, and our plan, Tuck. Yogi told me what you said about the taxpayers' right to know where their money is going, and it ties in with what a lot of us up here have been discussing.

"Most of our fellows are like Yogi—technicians who chose their line of work because they thought they could help make the world a better place to live in. Now that they have the chance to make the biggest contribution of their whole lives, they're all hemmed in by military rigamarole and red tape. It goes against the grain for scientists."

"You mean the Army is keeping the place top secret, so it can't be used for a . . . well, a health resort?"

The Captain nodded. "I'm not arguing with the military reasons for security. Maybe they're right on that score. But in the meantime, thousands of people are dying every day of disease, needlessly, while the Army keeps the secret that could

end those deaths. The people will find out about it eventually, and I don't think they'll like it. Suppose your mother were to die of cancer a few months from now, and you were to find out later that her death was unnecessary, and that your own government could have stopped it. What would you think? How about it, Peters, are you with us? What do you say?"

The Captain had been talking louder and faster till he was practically out of breath.

"I got just one thing to say, Captain. My baby sister died of T.B. just before her eighteenth birthday last year. You can bet your bottom nickel I'm with you on this deal, right down the line. Just give me the scoop. I'll go along."

Yogi and the CO slapped me on the back.

They explained to me, Mr. President, all about this secret Congressional hearing to be held on the Lunette project next week, and how I should go to Washington and get my Congressman to spring me as a surprise witness—a civilian who had been to Lunette and knew the score.

They knew all about what strings to pull to be sure I could get in, and they helped me figure out what I should say. They seemed to think

that my word, you know, the guy on the street or something like that, would carry some weight and make Congress see that the health angle on this Lunette project is a darned sight more important than keeping the secret of a guided missile station. Why, for Pete's sake, Mr. President. Uncle Sam owns Lunette, doesn't he? When the other side hears about this they'll want to get in on it so bad they'll be awful anxious to stay in our good graces. Probably turn out to be an even better military defense than guided missiles.

Time was important now, so just at five o'clock, when I generally report for work, Yogi and I walked down to the Matter BARS and shook hands. Yogi took a polaroid picture of me standing there and gave me the print. You know, Mr. President, I kind of hated to leave. That Lunette sure is a pretty place.

Yogi moved the two little balls together, and sure enough, like he had told me, I felt like I was catching a fit of sneezing. That was all, and there I was back at Diversified, in the restricted Signal Corps section, with the inspector staring at me.

He looks ready to pull a gun on me, so I laugh at him, nervous as heck inside but trying not to show it. "What's the matter, you seen a ghost?"

"How did you get in that cabinet, Peters?" He's really mad, and I'm wondering if I can pull it off.

"Well, I know you spend all your time over here by yourself, so I thought maybe someone should break the monotony. I just crawled in there a couple of minutes ago to surprise you." (That was true in a way, wasn't it?)

"Don't do that again, Peters. No harm done, I guess, but if I had moved those two little balls together without seeing you in there I don't know what would have happened to you!"

Mebbe you don't, but I do, I thought to myself. I scrambled out of there as soon as I was sure I had him sold on my story.

And that's all there is to the story, Mr. President, except that last week like a darned fool I had to drop that picture. It was one Yogi took of me with his Polaroid, standing by the Matter BARS with a bunch of Lunette coconuts (the boys call them Ikenuts, sir).

So my foreman sees the manhole cover in the picture and thinks that something must be funny and turns it in to our personnel manager. And *he* turns it over to the FBI, and I wouldn't tell em anything, and here I am in the clink.

So it looks like I've fouled up the boys' plans to use me as a secret weapon, and it looks like I've

fouled up my own life real good unless you can figure out a way to help me.

I think I will close now and leave the whole mess up to you.

Obediently yours,

Joe Peters .

* * *

THE WHITE HOUSE

Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Peters:

We are happy to learn that, in accordance with instructions from this office, you have been reinstated in your job and that the FBI and your employer are reassured as to your loyalty.

The President has asked me to extend his personal invitation to you to have lunch at the White House next Friday when you are in Washington for the hearing.

Your story interested him so much that he investigated it personally and thoroughly. As a result he has a special surprise in store for Congress and the American people on Friday. All I can divulge to you at this time is that his barber fainted this morning when he called at the White House to give the President his weekly trim.

Very truly yours,

Robert Kenwood

Special Assistant to the
President of the United
States

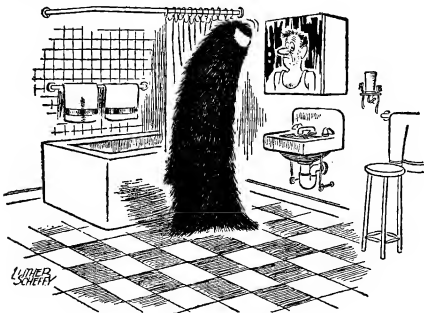
★ *Anti-Gravity Experiment* ★

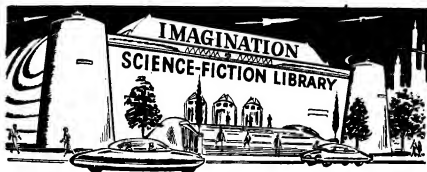
THE only situation on Earth where you can experience the effects of no gravity, is in simple free-fall, that is momentarily in a jump or in a falling plane or elevator. Researchers have rigged up a simple gadget to catch on film some of the effects of free-fall.

A bottle filled with water and a couple of pieces of dry ice was attached to a short wooden board. At the other end of the board was a camera pointing at the bottle. A technician climbed up a few stories of a building and dropped this simple apparatus out the window.

Ordinarily the bubbles of carbon dioxide released fumes upward violently when dry ice is put in water. But when the film of the freely falling bottle was watched after the experiment, the bubbles simply remained where they formed! In the absence of gravity effectively, while the bottle fell freely for a few seconds, the bubbles, water, dry ice, and bottle were just as if there were no gravity!

This neat, simple, and engaging experiment will be done with other things. Why didn't somebody think of it before!





— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review several titles — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THE SECOND GALAXY READER OF SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by H. L. Gold. 504 pages. \$3.50. Crown Publishers, Inc., New York City, N. Y.

This remarkably bulky volume contains thirty-one stories, certainly a representative statistical sampling of *Galaxy Magazine*! The quality is surprisingly high though really not unexpected when you consider the roster of authors—Heinlein, Sturgeon, Blish, Knight, Matheson, Vonnegut . . . and more.

For anyone unacquainted with s-f this would make an excellent introduction; to *aficionados* the anthology suffers from the fault of most such efforts—it is simply too recent. One feels as if he's read it all somewhere before (and he has—in the magazine)!

But that too-familiar feeling does

not detract from the quality of the stories, which are excellent. The first story "The Year of the Jackpot" by Heinlein sets the table and a feast follows for the science fiction devotee.

A simple categorization has been attempted; stories of tomorrow, time travel, adaptation, etc., adds nothing but prevents the wordy assault from being overwhelming.

It is your reviewer's personal feeling that there are too many anthologies just like this. The s-f reader has already read the stories and the non-reader of s-f won't see this volume aimed at him anyway—so, why? If you've read the magazine, why bother with the book?—if not, the book's worthwhile.

THE CAVES OF STEEL

by Isaac Asimov. 224 pages. \$2.95.
Doubleday and Company. New York
22, New York

Doubleday ordinarily produces much of the best science fiction printed today. Your reviewer has tried to be objective in analyzing this novel, but...

With that dubious beginning, I review another Asimov novel. Somebody must like his stories because they are published in an endless chain, but it is hard for me to see why. I think I shall be really "gone" if I must read another of these epics.

The canvas is of course, the galaxy—nothing less. There is the robot and the super-empire.

Using these ingredients in his inimitable way, Asimov hurls a furious barrage of words at the helpless reader. With Tom Swifitian naivete, characters move around in a really never-never world. Insipidity and dullness characterize the plodding story.

This venomous condemnation of the story will not be shared by everyone, but then perhaps everyone has not read through the jungle of this sort of writing. When you have finished, you ask, "why?"

The murdered Spaceman, a corpse in steel-roofed New York's vastness, is remembered by the robot detective and—you fill in from there. I need coffee after this one!

WORLDS IN SPACE

by Martin Caidin, 212 pages, \$4.95.
Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York.

In the last few years there have been many serious treatments of rocketry, space travel, etc. Some have been good, the most poor and hastily contrived to take advantage of rising popular interest. This book, however, is one of the best.

It is an up-to-the-minute survey of the nature and problem of space travel. It is a detailed history of rocketry from the V-2 on. It is a fascinating, interestingly written, competent survey of the scientific aspects of Man leaving his planet of origin.

It would not do to discuss this book without mentioning the name of its illustrator, Fred L. Wolff. Profuse illustrations, marvellously executed, fill the volume. They con-

tribute as much as the text itself. Nor are these illustrations copies or rehashes of what has appeared before so often.

While Willy Ley's superb volume on rocketry remains an excellent standard, this book, more recent and considerate of what has happened since the V-2, makes probably the best possible introduction to the field for anyone. Incidentally it is non-mathematical, though it does not shirk technological discussion where necessary.

Someday, some day not too remote, men are going into space. The manner of their going will not differ greatly from what is described here.

It is impossible to find any fault with the book. For any one interested in science and/or science-fiction this is a library "must."

Disease contaminated their ship; any moment one of them might become infected and spray lethal sparks to the others. There was no cure — except prevention. And that meant —

Three Spacemen Left To Die!

By

Russ Winterbotham

COMMANDER AL ANDREWS had closed and locked the energy-proof, neutralizing bulkheads against the creeping red glow that infected one quadrant of his circular space ship. Now he stood in the Control Center, in the mid-section of the revolving wagon-wheel ship, looking at Oakey Matthews.

There had been times aboard this ship when a whole crew had been comfortable in months-long trips through space. But now there were only three men, three men fleeing from death and it was no longer comfortable here, because death was breathing down the neck of at least one of them.

Oakey was intent on the instruments in front of him. Oakey was young, with a face that glowed with velvet skin. Even in space Oakey shaved every day, shined his

shoes and pressed his uniform. Al was sloppy, bearded and ungroomed. But Al had lived most of his 50 years in space.

Oakey looked up toward Al. His young eyes searched the hard leathery face of his commander. He saw the grim set to Al's jaw and the hard lines around the older man's eyes. Al was cold. Nerveless as a piece of rope.

"How's Joe?" Oakey asked.

Al shook his head. "Last stages," he said. The commander went to a tier of built-in drawers across the room from the control panel. His arm reached out, pulled on the third drawer from the bottom. From this drawer he took an old-fashioned revolver and a box of shells. Not ordinary shells. The bullets were plastic, strong enough to pierce flesh, too soft to rupture the walls of the space ship.



"Don't do it, Al," Oakey said, watching the commander.

Al shook his head. He slipped bullets into the cylinder.

"We're the last earthmen, let's not die killing each other," plead-

ed the young man. "This thing will catch us all before long. Let's stop fighting it. Joe's our pal. Let him live."

"We're the last earthmen and we're going down fighting," said

Al.

"We've fought. For ten years we've fought. Now we're in space, Al. So far from the sun we can't tell it from any other star. There's no earth women here. Even if we live a few years longer, the strain of earth-blood dies with us. We're licked, Al. Let's surrender gracefully."

"We're earthmen," said Al. "We fight."

"The last earthmen. There's nothing left to fight for—"

"Except life," said Al. "Now listen, Oakey. I'm still commander. I know what I'm doing and you take orders from me—or it's mutiny. Yeah, I know the Quinnies have covered the earth. From the Arctic to the tropics men died shooting sparks like fireworks. But the earth isn't the only planet in the Galaxy where men exist. You didn't take that first trip this ship made, did you, boy?"

Oakey laughed. "That was ten years ago. I was a kid in high school then."

AL flipped the cylinder closed and made sure the gun was ready to use. "We went to another system," he said. "A fluke, maybe. Or maybe the Old Man planned it. He believed in interstellar travel by dimensional short cuts. I was third mate, like you. I fingered the

controls and he gave me the figures. Something like a double right-angle repeated twice. I was dizzy as hell when I finally put old Wagon Wheel on a straight course, but after I blinked my eyes a couple of times and looked out through a porthole, I knew that the Old Man was right. There was the cutest little green planet, and the nicest, warmest fourth-magnitude sun you ever saw." He smiled and the hard lines disappeared for a moment. "Where are we now?"

"Sixty-three, seven, ninety-one. At 1300. I can work it down to twelve decimals, sir, if you want—"

"Never mind. Just watch the instruments. The chronometer lines will tell you when."

Al stuffed the revolver under his belt in the front of his trousers. "We're going back to that planet, Oakey. A pretty little place, soft and warm as a tropical isle. And there were nice looking people there—human beings like us." Al closed his eyes. "Such women. Nice round shoulders. Soft brown eyes you could spend a lifetime looking into. There was one . . ."

Al paused while his fingers seemed to caress the butt of the pistol. "She called herself something like Dwea . . . I taught her to speak English a little." The commander shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe you'll find a girl there, Oakey.

Maybe I'll see mine again. That was ten years ago." He chuckled. "She's probably got a husband and six kids now."

Al took a step toward the doorway marked C, one of four, each leading to a quadrant of the wagon wheel.

"Please, sir," said Oakey. "Don't —"

Al pulled open the door. "Time's getting short and we can't take the Quinnies to that planet with us." A sweep of centrifugal force caught him as he opened the door. His big hairy hand caught the rung of a ladder beside the door. "Joe went on that trip. He and I were the only ones of the crew that didn't catch the Quinnies the minute we landed back on earth. We ducked out again, shipping with a new commander with a new crew on old Wagon Wheel again. We went to Ganymede."

"Yeah," said Oakey. "I was cabin boy on that trip. My first space flight. Maybe that's how I escaped the Quinnies too." Oakey glanced at the chronometer. "We've still got fifty-five minutes. Why don't you wait twenty minutes or so?"

Al heaved a sigh and swung onto the ladder, letting himself down, which was outward, toward the rim of the wheel. "I might have trouble," he said.

AL put his hands against the bulkhead door. It was cool enough. The Death Glow wasn't seeping into the ship. The Glow itself wasn't the contagious part. It was the sparks that shot from men's bodies. The early stages of the disease were the dangerous ones, for then the sparks were often too small to be seen. In the later stages a man suffering from Quinnies gave off his own warning and could be avoided.

Al took a small intercom phone from a box beside the doorway. He spoke into it. "Joe."

A voice came back. "Yeah. That you, commander?"

"Yes, Joe. How do you feel?"

"Like hell, I guess. Funny though, there's no pain. Just annoying. Like the hiccups. And I'm getting weaker."

"You're in the last stages."

"Maybe. Maybe not. I've heard of guys that lived fourteen months shooting sparks worse than I'm doing right now."

"I'm coming in, Joe."

"Give me a break, Al. I won't come near you or Oakey. I'll stay here. There's food, water . . . everything I need. Just let me live till it starts to hurt. Maybe I'll ask you to come in then."

"There isn't time, Joe. Besides, it'll be easier this way. You're dying. You're shooting sparks from

your hair roots. Something might happen and Oakey and I would come down with the Quinnies. We are the only earthmen left now, Joe."

"Don't be too sure." Joe's voice was harsh, like the hissing of sparks. "You might have the Quinnies and not know it."

"You're not in pain?"

"Hell no. I told you I wasn't. But I'm lit up like the Fourth of July, Guy Fawkes Day, Bastille Day and the Chinese New Year."

"Your brain's a dynamo of energy, Joe. It's shooting Quinnies in all directions through every nerve fibre of your body."

"Are you trying to make it easier, or something?"

"I'm trying to make you understand. I've got to kill you. I'm not doing it because I want to. You're my best friend, Joe. We've had a lot of swell times together. But I've got to kill you—Oakey and I have to land on the Green Planet and we're not taking the Quinnies there with us."

"You're doing me a favor, huh? Some favor. Better make sure you haven't got the Quinnies yourself before you try to make like God."

"I'd know if I had 'em," said Al. "I'm coming in, Joe."

"I'll kill you first," said Joe. "As a favor to myself."

Al shot back the bolt. "Don't

try it, Joe."

The commander pulled on the door. It swung open a couple of feet. A bolt of red fire swept through the opening. But Al had expected this and he was safe behind the neutralizing door. Then Al stepped into the opening. He didn't need light, for Joe was a red glow against the quadrant wall.

Joe stood with his feet wide apart, with an aura of fire around his body. Flaming sparks seemed to lick the air to form an outline of a human being.

Joe raised his finger toward the commander and Al didn't wait. He squeezed the pistol's trigger and then stepped back behind the door as flame lashed toward him again. The report of the gun echoed.

"You murderers!" Joe groaned. His body hit the floor with a thud.

Al waited, then opened the door again. Joe lay on the floor. No sparks came from his body now. He looked like a sleeping man.

Outside, the cherry red glow of the quadrant ebbed till the sides were black as space.

Al put the gun back in the drawer in the control room. He closed it and then sank into a chair beside Oakey. The young man said nothing, but kept his eyes glued on the control panel.

Finally Al spoke. "Ever take the

test, Oakey?"

"No."

"Neither did I. Scared I might have it, I guess. But I kept telling myself that I might catch the Quinnies from the instruments they used to test you. Anyhow, I know the symptoms. I'd show symptoms if I had the Quinnies, wouldn't I?"

"Dunno. Joe knew the symptoms. He must have had it for a long time before he began shooting sparks." Oakey paused for a moment. "We've probably been exposed, Al."

"Yeah, we've been exposed a thousand times," the commander said. "Everybody on this ship except Joe and I died from the Quinnies after we returned from that voyage ten years ago. Everybody else I sailed space with died too—except you. There's some kind of immunity. Maybe we've got it. You and I."

The Quinnies isn't like measles or small pox, Al. Germs and viruses don't cause it. Something goes wrong with life itself."

"Maybe we should know something about life," Al grinned. "But after centuries of finding out about everything else, we don't know what life is. All biologists can tell us is that we're molecules strung together to make cells that produce some sort of energy."

"If we knew the cause of life . . ."

"We don't know the cause of anything . . . we get to one cause and wonder what caused it. We never know the first cause, and if we found it we'd ask what caused it. Everything goes around in circles. There's the carbon-nitrogen-hydrogen cycle that makes the sun hot—elements change and get back to where they started, losing just a little energy. That energy goes out into space, loses velocity and becomes matter, matter forms suns. Maybe life is part of the merry-go-round. Maybe energy makes matter, life results from matter; life produces a little energy."

"We're generators, huh?"

"Not exactly. Did you ever study a dynamo, Oakey? It doesn't make energy, it converts one form into another form, the stuff we call electricity. But it seems to do it intelligently. Supposing your generator makes a kilowatt of power and you're lighting a string of light bulbs with it. There's ten bulbs, each using 100 watts of power, but some economical so-and-so comes along and turns out five of them. You'd expect the generator to get all fouled up, or maybe burn out some wires, but it goes along at the same speed and makes just 500 watts of power, no more, no less. Dynamos are like that, they never

waste their output."

"Is that life?"

"In a way it is," said Al. "Like I said, we're not generators, but life may be just a process of making a little energy. We make just enough to keep the merry-go-round going. Then something goes wrong. We start making more than we should. We get overcharged, like a battery. The energy has to go somewhere, so we start shooting sparks."

Oakey laughed. "Your theories by-pass some of nature's laws and they would make a logician take to a sick bed, but they sound good." He turned his eyes on the chronometer a moment. "What fouls up the safety valve, as long as we're mixing metaphors?"

"Maybe we've got more than life," said Al. "We've got emotions, consciousness and a lot of things that life in general doesn't have. But you and I can control our emotions. We're cold-blooded. I just shot a friend, your friend too and you let me do it. Our cold-blooded common sense told us it was the thing to do. We have to stomp out the Quinnies before we land on the Green Planet. If you get the disease, I'll kill you, just like I killed Joe. If I get it, you'll kill me—"

"No, commander. I won't."

"Then I'll kill myself and save you the trouble. But maybe we won't get it. Maybe we're immune for one reason or another."

"We're not alike either in temperament or physically. I'm young, Al. You're older. You're a hell of a lot colder-blooded than I am. Hell, I've got emotions. I couldn't do what you did. Organically we're different, too. My cells may be the same, but they're conditioned differently. I'm allergic to certain kinds of cheese—"

"So are lots of people. I could establish an allergy to the same things you can't take. That shows our chemistry *is* the same."

Oakey glanced at the instruments again. "Better take over, sir. There's only four minutes left."

Al strapped himself into his seat. Oakey already had adjusted his harness and now the two men adjusted their bodies to fit the contours of the chairs that would lessen the punishment of sudden acceleration.

The commander gripped the lever that would kick atomic fuel into the rocket chambers.

"One minute," said Oakey.

Al injected the fuel and then placed his finger over the firing button.

"Thirty seconds . . . twenty . . . ten . . . five, four, three, two—"

Both men tensed.

"—one . . . ZERO!"

Their bodies strained as the ship lurched. Oakey counted the seconds with his hand, for he could not talk now. Al squeezed the control button again. This was repeated again. And again. Then Al cut the rockets. The pressure on their bodies eased. Both men relaxed.

Al unstrapped himself and swung his legs to the floor. He walked toward the porthole. He had to walk carefully, for the centrifugal pitch made the feat like balancing on a turntable.

He reached up and adjusted the flaps. Into the room streamed warm sunlight. A glowing orb swung into view as the ship turned on its axis. A moment later they saw another disc, a bright green disc, a planet hanging in space.

"We're there!" whispered Oakey.

Al said nothing. His eyes were not on the planet, but on his hand, raised a fraction of an inch from the flap control on the metal wall of the ship. Writhing like a snake from his fingertips to the wall, was a tiny red spark!

OAKEY turned his eyes from the porthole to the silent commander. He saw the ribbon of flame. His body grew tense. Slowly his hands fingered the buckles on the straps of his G-harness. He unfastened them and sprang to his

feet. Al didn't try to stop him as Oakey swung across the turn-table room toward the tier of drawers.

"Make it quick, Oakey," said Al.

Oakey opened the drawer, took out the gun and thrust it into his pocket.

"Shoot me, Oakey. You've got to. We can't take the Quinnies to that planet!"

"I won't."

"It's mutiny. Give me the gun; I'll kill myself."

"There's no such thing as mutiny any more, Al. We're just two men in space. The last earthmen alive. The problem will solve itself."

"Oakey, we're not going to land on the planet alive."

"Be yourself. We've made a good fight. We lost. Let's die with a solid piece of ground under our legs. What if we do infect a planet with a plague. There's a thousand planets just like it in the universe. Every man on them will die, if not today, then in a few years from now. What difference does it make? Why should we try to keep the merry-go-round going?"

"Because . . . there's a reason. We don't know what it is, but we've got to live and we've got to die. But we've got to preserve life every second we can."

"Is that why you want me to kill you? To preserve life?"

"One life doesn't matter." Al

pointed to the porthole. "It's a whole world of living human beings . . . people like us."

"We don't owe them anything."

Al pushed himself away from the wall, toward Oakey across the room by the tier of drawers. But the reflexes of youth were on Oakey's side. The young man's punch caught Al flush on the jaw and the bearded commander went down.

WHEN Al opened his eyes, Oakey was decelerating the circular ship into a spiral that would set it down on the planet.

Al raised himself on his arms and pulled himself toward the control panel. "You can't do this, Oakey. You're killing a world."

"What's that world to us?"

Al looked at the metal floor plates under his body. The cherry glow was flooding from his body into the plates. Al was gone farther than he thought. For months he must have been harboring the disease, just as Joe had been ill a long time before realizing it. Al's natural resistance, perhaps strengthened by long years of exposure to the radiations of space, must have held back the final stages until the tide had burst through in an overwhelming flood. Even when Al killed Joe, Al was near the last stages himself.

Al remembered Joe's last bid for survival. Joe was much like Oakey. Joe had hated to die, he wanted to live to have soil under his feet again. But the disease had to be wiped out. And Joe had fought with his last weapon, the energy ebbing from his body.

The energy . . .

Grim lines appeared deep around Al's eyes. He raised his hand from the floor. His brain throbbed. Yes, his brain was a battery of energy now, the energy of life. And the purpose of life was to preserve life, a single second, or a thousand million years. Not one life, but the race. That was the aim of life.

"Oakey." Al's voice hissed.

Oakey turned from the instrument panel. His eyes focussed on the cherry red floor with Al in the center of the glow.

Sparks came from Al's mouth as he spoke again. "Before I shot Joe, I tried to make him understand. I had to kill him, and I've got to kill you whether you've got the disease or not. It's the way with things. Our individual lives don't mean a plugged nickel, but a whole race does. We can't take the Quinies to the green planet."

"I told you, they're not people like us," said Oakey. "They just look like us. Some fish look like snakes. Some mammals look like fish. But they're not fish."

"But they are like us. I know," said Al. "An atom of iron on Sirius is the same as an atom of iron on the sun. Why can't two human cells be the same, even if they're light-years apart?"

"You're just guessing."

"I told you, I know."

"You think you know. You met a girl once. Maybe she had a nice figure and pretty eyes. Your glands got fooled."

"She was just like an earth-girl, only prettier. That's why—"

"Maybe she was pretty, but that was ten years ago. You're not handsome any more and neither is she. She's probably got six kids, you said so yourself."

"Yes, Oakey, maybe six, maybe only one kid. One that has earth

blood in him. My kid, Oakey. There's still one more earthman alive in the universe. That's why I'm doing this to you."

Al let the energy flow out through his fingertips. A cherry red bolt struck Oakey right in the face.

ON the green planet, a matron and her son were looking up into the stars. The boy cried out in delight: "A shooting star, mommy," he said. "Make a wish."

Trailing red sparks, the meteor seemed to veer off suddenly and speed away again into space.

"I wished that your father would return from the skies," said the woman. "For a moment, I thought maybe he had."

THE END



"Sorry, babe, you're just not my type!"



Conducted by Mari Wolf

THE cars converge on a spot in the Mojave desert, some ninety miles from Los Angeles. They have left the paved highway and made their way over a series of progressively less tended roads, oiled and dirt, and now they have parked in a semicircle at the end of the last dirt road, facing a fenced compound. The cars are empty. At first glance the compound they face seems empty also.

Inside the compound are several structures—a Quonset hut, a prefabricated house, a concrete blockhouse, a couple of tall skeletal structures which are rocket launching towers. A little earlier the area was swarming with people, but now no one is in the open, and unless you could sight directly through the bulletproof glass of the blockhouse windows you might think the area deserted.

Over the blockhouse a red flag is flying. From the blockhouse out to the nearer launching tower power lines are strung. A rocket is mounted in this tower. It isn't a very large rocket; if you were looking in from outside the area with no idea as to what was taking place you'd probably not even spot it.

The area faces out toward the deserted parked cars. Beyond them, quite a few yards out, are a series of trenches—long foxholes with earthworks and timber barricades raised up in front of them. Looking at them now you shouldn't be able to see any people—but you would see some, their heads still sticking up over the barricades as they watch the rocket.

Sixty seconds till firing, sixty seconds till firing . . . The public address system is loud and blaring. Forty-five seconds . . . thirty sec-

onds . . . The heads duck down.

Ten seconds till zero . . . A smoke flare goes off like a gunshot, and invariably some overly nervous person trips the shutter of a camera too soon. The countdown progresses . . . nine, eight, seven, six . . . The red smoke from the flare drifts up over the blockhouse alerting the people in the tracking stations hundreds of yards farther out in the desert

Five, four, three, two, one, FIRE!

For a fraction of a second nothing happens. In the blockhouse the man at the console has pushed the firing button; the ignitor lights the powder charge that ignites the fuel. Still, to the watchers for a brief instant there is nothing.

Then, suddenly, the explosion. A blast of smoke from the rocket spreads out over the ground, and hundreds of feet up the rocket is still rising.

It gains altitude fast, traveling with perhaps ten g's acceleration. It is too fast to see leaving the tower; the angle of vision changes quickly as it reaches a high elevation. It rises almost vertically, growing smaller and smaller, but easy to follow with the smoke generators pouring smoke out along its path.

As the rocket reaches the top of its trajectory and turns over starting to descend a strange optical, or perhaps psychological, phenomenon takes over. To the watchers in the pits it seems that the rocket is heading straight down—at them. There are two or three seconds in which the watcher, although knowing the trajectory doesn't come

anywhere near him, still feels like burrowing into the ground, away from the descending missile. Then its course becomes apparent. It is falling free into the desert, gathering speed . . .

There is a pop, very faint, for the rocket is perhaps a half mile up. A powder charge goes off and blows the nose free of the body. From the two sections parachutes unroll, spread open; there is a crack and then the descent is slowed. The rocket is no longer a streamlined missile falling free, but two pieces, one large and one small, drifting down on bright orange chutes, plainly visible against the desert sky.

The cameras are recording the descent. The recovery crews are ready to race out to rescue the rocket from the crowd that is certain to pour out from the pits in another couple of minutes. The firing is over; now all that remains to do is evaluate the data gained on this flight, testing the working of all instrumentation on the rocket, evaluate the construction of body, motor, fins, and recovery system. And build the next one...

All through the spring and fall the Pacific Rocket Society conducts its firing at the Mojave Test Area. A few of the firings are public, such as the one described above; at these the rockets shown are usually models that have already undergone considerable testing, so that they can be considered safe and also fairly sure to perform creditably. But for every public firing there may be half a dozen private firings and static testings

of rocket motors, as well as hundreds of hours of design work, construction work, and work on data reduction and instrumentation.

Why fire rockets? A lot of people want to know what's the purpose of an amateur organization like the Pacific Rocket Society, which can never hope to duplicate the work done by the government or the big aircraft companies. Perhaps part of the appeal of a group such as the PRS can be explained by the very fact that is it a hobby group, and amateur, and that if you want to design a rocket yourself and have enough technical knowledge to build one that will meet safety requirements, you can do so. A lot of the PRS members actually work on rockets professionally, but the two phases aren't the same. The entire accent is different.

A person may belong to a group like the PRS for one of a number of reasons. He may be interested in some particular phase of design, have some pet theories he wants to try out in practice. He may like to build things, and get more pleasure out of seeing his creation go up a mile or two than he would seeing a model airplane, for instance, go around and around on the end of a string. He may be interested in space travel—the science fiction fan, you might say, experimenting in the medium which will one day bring about a science fiction world.

There isn't really much overlap, though, between rocket fans and science fiction fans. Usually in a city you'll find both stf people and rocket people—and the membor-

ships will be quite distinct.

There are quite a few rocket societies in the United States, but of them all the PRS (and the Reaction Research Society, which also uses the Mojave Test Area) are perhaps the most fortunate, in that they have a fine rocket testing site not too far distant. Most large cities aren't located near enough to a desert for the members to go about blithely shooting off rockets—and consequently most clubs have had to be content with working on rocket motors, static testing them, and also to a large extent sticking to written theorizing.

The Pacific Rocket Society has the desert. It has a fairly ambitious program; the current club project, the SRV, or standard research vehicle, should attain an altitude of twenty or twenty-five miles. There's also a biological research program under consideration—a program in which mice will be tested under actual flight conditions at various accelerations and in various attitudes to determine what they can stand in the way of rocket flight. And, of course, what man can stand—later.

Now to the fanzines for this month.

* * *

PACIFIC ROCKET SOCIETY BULLETIN: P. O. Box 698, Hancock Station, Los Angeles 44, Calif. If you're seriously interested in rocketry you might write to the Society regarding a Bulletin subscription or perhaps joining the PRS as a corresponding member. Especially if you're interested in the technical aspects of rocket con-

struction and instrumentation you will find much of value here; but if you're not technically inclined, the Bulletin, would be dry reading.

* * *

PHILADELPHIA ASTRONAUTICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN: 30c a single copy; 3421 N. 3rd St., Philadelphia 40, Penna. Leon M. Slawewski is editor-in-chief of this Society Bulletin, which contains, in addition to news of the PAS activities and projects, some very good articles on astronautics.

In the issue I have here Thomas E. Purdon writes on "Space Power for World Peace," discussing the proposed space station and its possible effects on world peace and world politics. Mr. Purdon presents a logically thought out argument, far from one sided (and though you might not agree with all his conclusions you must admit their possibility). It's an article that would go well in a less specialized field also, for it would be helpful reading for the overly starry-eyed idealist as well as for the it-couldn't-possibly-be-done debunker.

The PAS Bulletin is not, however, aimed at a science fiction audience; most of it is technical, and slanted to the serious student of rocketry.

* * *

PSYCHOTIC: 10c; Dick Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland, Oregon. I have both No. 9 and No. 10 here. No. 9 has, for a fourth cover, the greatest cartoon I have ever seen concerning fandom. By Dave Rike, it shows a beanie covered individual typing a letter . . .

"Dear Mr. President: Re. your recent letter to me: I feel that I am not subject to Selective Service on account of some mysterious mutant strain in my make up which makes me different and that . . ."

This should be preserved for *one hundred and seventh* fandom!

V. L. McCain's "Padded Cell" was interesting, though using non fan material. (That's merely a statement, not criticism.) Lyle Kessler gives, along with some reviews, predictions of what will happen to the major promags. He hedged his bets well and I don't think he can go far wrong.

In No. 10 McCain gives, for free, a new type of interlineations—the logical progression will be to print a story printed solely by interlineations scattered (in order) through the rest of the zine . . . An idea like this could bankrupt "Scrabble!"

No. 10 also has a good critical review of *Fahrenheit 451*, a review that I think Bradbury would agree with.

The letter column proves again that a reasoning mind can usually defeat blind instinct. The letter in question (mentioning no names but his initials are Claude Hall) uses almost two pages to rave against Geis, and society in general. Geis comments, "Such a naked exposure of personality you reveal."

* * *

S. F.: \$1.00/year; John Magnus, Federal 203-B, Oberlin, Ohio. Bill Venable does a comprehensive article, "Fantasy or Science Fiction." Can't say that I completely agree

with him but it's a very logical and interesting treatment of a point that usually brings arguments instead of discussions.

Shelby Vick, in his column, bemoans the fact that for years in science fiction the term tri-di has been used, but when Hollywood actually came out with it, it was called 3D. Vick doesn't see why. You will find the reason is the same used in advertising—make it as simple and least likely to confuse as possible. When nylon was first introduced it was intended to be spelled *nilon*, but the hucksters quickly pointed out that *nilon* could be pronounced two ways, that a woman who was self-conscious about pronouncing it would ask for silk or rayon instead. Spelled *nylon*, there's no question. The same goes with *tri-di*. Would a non fan say "tree-dee." "tree-die," "try-dee," or "try-die?" Touche?

The other big article is a report by Harlan Ellison concerning the Midwest Convention at Indian Lake. This report differs greatly from others I've read—I have no idea which is the most accurate. I do wonder if Ellison's expose isn't partly "yellow journalism." But, on the other hand, it could have happened exactly that way . . . He was there. I wasn't.

* * *

LYRIC: 10c; Jim Bradley, 545 N.E. San Rafael, Portland, Ore. This, with the exception of the editorial, is all poetry. About 20 poems. They range from re-written Poe, "Hannabel Lee," to Little Willy. Some of them are pure doggerel but some ("Walk On," "Whis-

pering Winds," "Contagion," and many more) are serious attempts with varying degrees of success. "Granada" caught my eye—it seems to be a montage of three popular records: "Granada," "Johnny Guitar," and "My Restless Lover," (originally, also called "Johnny Guitar").

If they can get enough material this could be very successful. It's a beautiful job of duplicating.

* * *

EISFA: 5c; Juanita Wellons, 224 South College, Muncie, Indiana. The official organ of the Eastern Indiana Science Fiction Association, EISFA is a better than average mimeo job, with rather good art. The quality of the fiction and articles varies greatly. Ross Allen does a very good review of MAD (and similar) comics but Thomas Stratton overdoes an overdone gimmick: footnotes on footnotes.

The rest of the material is routine but it wouldn't surprise me to see this zine gradually work into a very good product. The one thing that bothers me is that all of the names on the contents page sound like phonies. Hmm?

* * *

OOPSLA! 15c; bimonthly; Gregg Calkins, 2817 11th St., Santa Monica, Calif. Editor Calkins manages to keep turning *Oopsla!* out in his spare time, a real feat considering that he's in the Marine Corps, stationed at Camp Pendleton, and has to travel about a hundred miles to reach his mimeo. The zine, though published a little less frequently than before, still maintains its fine format and reading style.

Vernon McCain in his column "The Mark of McCain," discusses the comic book MAD—he's not a MAD fan, so there should be quite a lot of comment in the letters to the editor column. Walt Willis in "The Harp that Once or Twice" discusses just about everything—*Quandry*, his early days with *Slant*, particular puns, and a short section entitled "Up the Garden Pathology." This last is about the fannish complaint of *annishthesia*, contagious among those who put out annual issues of their fanzines. He describes its symptoms and their result, and what happens when the fan completes his masterpiece, mails it out, and then fails to receive critical acclaim for it. (That's why it's called *annishthesia*—there's no paeon.) (Sic.)

It's a good issue. But then *Oops!* has long been a consistently good fanzine, with an excellent choice of columnists and copy.

* * *

KAYMAR TRADER: 10 or 4/25c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. So., Moorhead, Minnesota. In the issue I have here—the Annual issue — there's an especially large number of books for sale by various collectors and ex-collectors. If you are building up your own collection of stf or fantasy, or if you're on the lookout for good buys of some of your favorite books, you'd do well to study this trading zine. Particularly if you want to get hold of scarce or out of print books, or back issues of magazines, you'll find this a great help.

In this Annual issue the editor

reminisces about the early history of the *Trader*, which has been going since 1946. Cover artist Neil Austin, who did a cover back in '47 for this zine, now does an up to date version of same for this issue. There are book reviews by M. McNeil and Roy Dixon, and a lot of ads—even one for circus fans.

* * *

SPIRAL: 10c; bimonthly; Denis Moreen, 214 Ninth St., Wilmette, Illinois. *Spy* runs a column by *Psychotic's* Dick Geis, "The Violent Ward," which, like just about everything of Geis', is very well written and certain to stir up controversy. He asks, "What is a science fiction fan, and why?" Why do people like stf, and what causes certain people to become fans?

He depicts the personality of a typical fan. He mentions the heroes of many stf classics, and the urge of people to identify with a "homo superior," and he draws a neatly devastating analysis of the person who wishes to escape from a world that doesn't understand him into a superior world. Valid? It's good reading! I bet a lot of fans will howl in wrath . . . and there should be some interesting counter arguments later . . .

Dennis Murphy, who isn't editor (Moreen) writes a story about "Those Good Old Days," or how unfortunate is the time traveler who has to depend on last century's medical science. An interesting idea, but one that could have stood a lot of further development.

* * *

SPACE TIMES: 20c (or 1 shilling); American representative,

Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minn. This zine is published by Stuart Mackenzie and Brian Varley at 5 Hans Place, London, S.W. 1, England. It's a rather large zine with fine covers (professionally printed by Scion Publications, a British house).

Bert Campbell's account of last year's World Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia continues, gayly as ever, into the post convention festivities. Next month: Los Angeles, with 4E Ackerman as Campbell's host.

Bill Morse has a short article on what you'll find at a science fiction gathering (British); it's called "Morse at the White Horse" and it gives some very good character studies—and they *are* characters too, fannish and otherwise. Then there's Walt Willis and Mickey Spillane, or "Mike Hammer at the Philcon," and the future magazine field—"Sexy Detective Western Fantasy."

One innovation in *Space Times* is the Writer's Workshop, a feature wherein each month a submitted story is published, followed by criticisms of the story by other writers and editors. The stories are published under pennames; this one, "Jim's Jinx," is an attempt at satire well criticized, I think, in the concluding sections of the Workshop.

* * *

STARLIGHT: 10c; Laddie London and Don Howard Donnell, 5425 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles 29, Calif. In addition to the editors, Charles Wilgus is the publisher of this good looking fanzine, which has excellent reproduction,

artwork and layout. It started strictly as an advertising medium, supported by its ads, and was given free on request, but now it is switching over to running more stories and articles, although it will still include advertising.

In the issue I have here Elmer Kirk writes "The Siamese Soul," a story about Siamese twins. It seems more in the realm of occultism than of fantasy, though, in addition to being written in an exceedingly grandiose style.

Henry Moskowitz's review column "Spatial Relations" is very good, and so is another regular feature, the "Fantasy Spotlight," which gives short autobiographical accounts of science fiction personalities. This issue: Alfred Bester.

* * *

ZIP: 5c; Ted White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Virginia. Here's a digest sized fanzine filled with articles, a bit of fiction, and a lot of controversy. Most of Nos. 2 and 3, which I have here, are given over to an argument between *Brevzine's* Warren Freiberg and the rest of fandom, in which Freiberg accuses fans of being jackasses and fans strive to refute his arguments. (A hard, if not impossible task, seeing the complete lack of logic in Freiberg's original attack.)

Sam Moskowitz has a short bit of fiction about rockets that revolves about the fact that above the atmosphere "there ain't nothing for it to push against." Sam should read up on rockets . . .

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; pub-

lished twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. Here's the newspaper of science fiction—the newszine that can keep you up to date on everything going on in the science fiction world. It covers all fields of special interest to science fiction fans: the magazine and book publishers, the movies, radio, TV, comics. It's not limited to American news; you'll find about the latest entrants to the sf publishing field from all over the world, and you'll often see reproductions of the covers of foreign magazines, British, Scandinavian, Dutch . . .

Professional activities are given thorough coverage, and such fan affairs as the various regional conventions (not to mention national and international ones) are also reported on.

* * *

HYPHEN: 2/25c; Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, N. Ireland. What would you call *Hyphen*? The fanzine's fanzine? Anyhow, it's one of the few zines left that can gather between two green covers (the first a cartoon, the second a mass of interlineations strung together) the writings of the top humorists of the so-called sixth fandom, and earlier. Though

in this issue you won't find Bob Bloch, except in the letter column, there's Chuck Harris on a little bit of everything, Charles Burbee on F. Towner Laney, and Bob Tucker on Art. This last you must see to appreciate—it's about the portrayal of female anatomy for fanzines, with illustrations.

Redd Boggs, one of best serious analysts of fandom and related activities left writing in the field, has an article, "The Funlovers," decrying the current trend toward making fanzines funny, all funny, and nothing but funny. I agree with him thoroughly. For one thing, few fans are Walter Willis, Bob Tucker or Bloch, and the unskilled fan's humor can fall very, very flat. (Though it's not easy to write a good serious fanzine either. How many editors could turn out Silverberg's *Spaceship*?)

Hyphen may lack the ambitious layout *Slant* featured—but it has the talent.

* * *

Well, that's all in the BOX this time. Remember, send your fanzines to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next issue . . .

—Mari Wolf

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L etters

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ON IMAGINATIVE TALES

Dear Bill:

On the whole, you guys have thrown out a pretty good mag these last few months. SLAVES TO THE METAL HORDE in the June issue was fairly good, except for that title! Surely Lesser can think of better ones than that—or did you put it on?

St. Reynard's THE GIANTS FROM OUTER SPACE in the May issue was good too, especially if you like "space opera". I love it, and I'd like to see more from St. Reynard and Rog Phillips too.

Which issues of Madge contained TOFFEE stories? I read one through a friend and have been eagerly awaiting more.

Keep up the letter column and three cheers for FANDORA'S BOX! Ditto for the book reviews. I like to see them although I don't always agree with the reviewer on his evaluation of a book.

Keep up INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR, as it is always interesting to hear something about the

author—from the author! More cartoons and less science briefs. In general though, keep Madge the way she is.

What are the subscription rates for IMAGINATIVE TALES? I'm not even waiting to see the first issue—I'll subscribe to it sight unseen! If it's anything like Madge it'll just have to be good!

Janice Jacobson
2430 Garth Ave.

Los Angeles 34, Cal.

We must admit we thought of the title for the Lesser story. So don't chastise Milt! Glad you love space opera — Madge will be featuring some of the best suspense-action science fiction thrillers you've ever read. And boys like Swain, Lesser, St. Reynard, etc., will be writing them for us! The February 1951 and June 1952 issue of Madge contained TOFFEE stories. AND—the October issue coming up will contain another brand new novel in the series. Between Madge and our sister book, IMAGINATIVE TALES, you'll be getting a good deal of TOFFEE. Speaking of

IMAGINATIVE TALES, the first issue featuring **TOFFEE**—a book-length novel—is now on sale at your favorite newsstand. Subscription rates will be the same as those for *Madge*—that is, 12 issues for \$3.00. Same address as *Madge*, naturally. So subscribe today—or dash to your nearest dealer and get that big first issue! *wlh*

SATISFIED NEW READER

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is a first attempt at the task of writing a letter to *Madge*—or any magazine for that matter. But don't think I haven't thought of it, and quite a few times at that. I've been a stf reader since 1949, and I'm only 19 now.

My only gripe is that I don't

have all the green folding stuff I'd like to keep me steadily supplied with stf reading!

I only ran across *Madge* back about three months ago; my local newsstand hadn't handled it before . . . So thus far I've got the April, May, and June issues. This is simply to let you know you've got a new satisfied reader, and just so long as you keep up the present quality of *Madge* it won't miss my sights in the future!

—What say some of you fems and fans drop me a few lines of space jargon?

Ferrell Cooper
Trade, Ala.

Welcome aboard, sir, and rest assured Madge will keep its high entertainment level with forthcoming issues wlh

Back Issues of Imagination Available

—SEE PAGE 49 TO SUBSCRIBE FOR COMING ISSUES—

May 1952, No. 10	()	August 1953, No. 21	()
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February 1953, No. 16	()	February 1954, No. 27	()
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ALAS, POOR MADGE!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Have just finished the June issue. This was undoubtedly your worst issue. Quality of your stories for the past couple of months has gone from very good to fair to terrible.

It seems to me the next issue will be your last. The time comes for all science fiction mags to fold, and it's your turn. You won't be missed!

Charles Roderick

8918 134th St.

Richmond Hill, N. Y.

We're happy to inform you that Madge has a long life expectancy. Many, many thousands of happy readers attest to that. Come to think of it, that calls for a toast. We'll let Pete Eberhard make it in the following letter with

AND LONG LIFE TO YOU!

Dear Bill:

I am just becoming able to appreciate FANDORA'S BOX in each issue of *Madge* for what it is, the best "fanzine" review in the pro ranks. In the past I've read it as an interested outsider would; enjoying the reviews and in general wondering what it was all about. This can probably be applied to most of *Madge's* readers. Now that I've become an active fan my only regret is not having done it before.

I think most people forget that if it hadn't been for fandom back in the early 40's and late 30's stf would still be an obscure bit of off-trail fantasy. So just a reminder that fandom is always looking for

new members—the more the merrier.

Getting back to *Madge*. I am looking over back issues of said mag and I find the July 1952 issue. The cover story is NO TIME FOR TOFFEE! This brings me to my monthly plea, "Bring back TOFFEE!"

It's been a long time since your picture has graced the portals of "Introducing the Author". Back in 1946 in *Fantastic Adventures*, and now in the June issue of your own magazine, *Madge*. The most noticeable change is that you comb your hair differently.

Here's my current toast: Long life to you and IMAGINATION!

Peter Eberhard

44 Mountain View Ave.

Pearl River, N. Y.

We don't mind repeating the good TOFFEE news—you'll find a book-length TOFFEE novel in the first issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES now on sale, and Madge will feature a new TOFFEE novel next month. So you remember seeing our photo in FA back in '46 . . . Actually, Pete, we still comb our hair the same way. The only difference we note is an insidious flecking of premature gray (we're only 33!) around the temples. But since our wife approves contending it gives us a certain air of dignity, we'll tolerate the change. Thanks for the toast; we'll drink heartily to that! with

GOOD FIVE YEAR RECORD

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Hope you have time for praise and a gripe from a negligent reader.

First we'll hit the June cover with some of the praise. I like it! Showing only two humans in this cover painting gave me the impression that the hero of the Lesser novel and the ever-present heroine would end up as guests of honor at a robot necktie party. And as a would be sadist where reading is concerned, I snatched the mag off the stands!

Now for the gripe. One novelette beats two or three separate shorts any day. Need I say more?

Keep *Madge's* features and departments. They're indispensable I like most of them, but don't particularly care for a few. However, there are readers who would scream bloody murder if you dropped those I don't like!

Too many readers rate the con-

tents of a magazine as if they had the power of life and death for the author. This is silly. You will run a certain story regardless of how often a minority rejects it. So let me say, just keep running the type of stories you've been running for the past five years. *Madge* has built up a good publishing record.

Jim White

462½ N. Ogden Dr.

Los Angeles 36, Cal.

We predict the next five years will be even better, Jim. As to novelettes, we try and balance an issue with one long length and shorter length stories. Most readers seem to prefer this arrangement . . . with

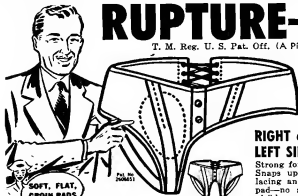
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SANITARY

I have just finished reading the June issue of IMAGINATION. Lesser's novel was up to his usual great standard of mediocrity. It was his usual great-epic-of-Earth with the hero saving the human race, not to mention the heroine. Fine for the comic books. It's a shame too, since Lesser *can* write well when he wants to.

The shorts were fair, but not worth the cover price. And that cover! G-a-a-a! Would you please tell Malcolm Smith to stick to drawing space ships; his drawings of people look like pictures of wax models. But really, he does draw space ships well.

Now, on to the subject of blasphemy. One's moral opinions are one's own business and you are entitled to yours. But I think it is to your advantage not to antagonize your readers. After printing that magnificent story, PATROL, (October 1952) it seems—well, dishonest—of you to endorse blasphemy. If not, as I said, you're entitled to your own opinion. But at least be honest about it,

Paula Friedman

3722 Appleton St., NW

Washington 16, D. C.

So you didn't like Smith's cover on the June issue? What about the robot he painted—we think Malcolm outdid himself on that cover. However we will go along with you that perhaps his figure work was not as "par Smith" as usual. Hey now, what gives you the idea we're endorsing cuss words? We only pointed out that profanity crops up in the best of circles and occasional usage does not constitute moral censorship. But Dick Ed-

wards has a word on that subject in the letter to follow . . . whh

NOBODY CORRUPTED!

Dear whh:

Thank Ghu, an improvement! The June issue was more like the good old Madge I like so well. For one thing, there was a female on the cover. For another, the lead novel by Lesser was really good. I fully agree however with Gordon Pape. Your usual lead has a tendency to be hammy. But not this Lesser piece.

Being a teenager like Jean Courtois (in the June letter section) I fully agree with her. Teenagers aren't corrupted by strong language. Damn it! It's only natural to cuss like Hell at certain times! I can't see anybody being so easily corrupted.

On to the stories. The lead novel, SLAVES TO THE METAL HORDE was pretty good, as I said before. RECEPTION COMMITTEE had a neat little twist. THE SCANDALIZED MARTIANS was the best story in the issue for my money.

Nice bit of sarcasm from Alex Saunders. I'd like to try that first trip to Luna. At any rate, I hope to be on one, at least!

Dick Edwards

2708 Penn Ave., N

Minneapolis 11, Minn.

Watch those naughty words, Dick! But seriously, we do believe you have a point in that an occasional use of expletives will not corrupt anyone . . . What's this bit of sarcasm you mention in regard to Alex Saunders' letter in the June issue?

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We thought Alex had made a fine point in extending tribute to the heroes of space to come . . . with

NO UN SPACE STATION

Dear Mr. Hamling:

On reading the letter section in the June issue of *Madge*, I ran across Bess Hecht's letter and your reply.

I don't usually take enough interest in letters to write one myself, but I felt that you, sir, deserve a large pat on the back for your well thoughtout answer.

Having been born and raised in the USA I might be a little prejudiced — I think America is the greatest and most wonderful nation on Earth. In short, I would do anything, including risking my own life to assure the safety of our country, and I would oppose just as vigorously, anything that would endanger our country.

Thus, I believe, as you obviously do, that to hand a space station over to the United Nations with the world as it is today would definitely be taking a chance on losing everything.

I agree with Miss Hecht that "a world with two space stations, one American, the other Russian, would be a dangerous place to live in," but I do not agree with her that a UN space station would not be a "competitive area". It would inevitably be the competitive area.

The solution? I can see only two possible ones. The best solution will be brought about naturally if the human race ever matures to the point where international strife is abolished. However, the only solu-

tion possible at this time as far as I can see is for the USA to be the first and only nation to establish a space station. Certain other nations would, of course, live in terror, but they would soon learn that as long as the USA is "on top" the world would have to be a peaceful place.

This is putting a lot of faith in our country, but I believe that the faith is justified.

This may sound idealistic, but then, hasn't America always been the most idealistic nation on Earth? Perhaps that is why we all, love her so. It could also be that this is one of the reasons she has become the world leader today.

Oh yes, thanks for telling us a little about yourself, ed, in the June issue.

Virginia Porter
1607 McCadden
Hollywood 25, Cal.

The thought occurs to us, Ginny, that your first solution might well be brought about by institution of your second, to wit: the USA establishing a space station. Why? Consider history. Global struggles are comparatively a product of our 20th century—the century of scientific advancement that has made the world a small place to live in. No longer are there "new frontiers" to open for any nation. Those with expansion for conquest on their minds can only covet their neighbors' goods. And today, irrevocably, this means global war. But looking ahead, if the USA develops and establishes a space station, the next step is reaching Luna. Think of the vast mineral wealth that will open up to man . . . And after Luna certainly Venus and Mars will be

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How many times have you been talking or thinking about a person—then suddenly he or she appears? You had no reason to expect him (or her). But your inner mind knew!

Do you ever have the premonition that something is going to happen—then, lo and behold, just what you thought DOES happen?

Have you ever started to say something at exactly the same instant that someone else started to utter the SAME words?

Have you ever had a dream—and, lo and behold, your dream became a reality, just as your inner mind had predicted it?

We've all had uncanny experiences like these. You can't possibly explain them in any way you want, for you DO have a sixth sense, but this mysterious power is developed to a higher degree in some people than in others.

Some years ago the noted "Father of modern psychology," Will James of Harvard, made the astonishing statement that man's people use only 10% of their mental power! The other 90%, he said, "lies idle. Now at last science is making it easy for us to USE that vast reserve of brain power!"

A few people seem to know instinctively the secret of harnessing this power. Others must learn. But once you learn the secret, NOTHING is beyond your power—NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE!

This doesn't mean we can all be Einstein, Edison or Faraday. It does mean that we can have the happiest, peace of mind and feeling of security—plus the success in our chosen life's work—without having every right to want and expect!

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As You Think — So You ARE!

That phrase comes from the Bible. It is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago! But NOW we know the means to think about the night! Now we know how much better we can make our lives by simply releasing and putting to work the tremendous forces which have been lying dormant in our mind!

Of course you'd like to have a better home, a happier, fuller life. More understanding, respect and love from your family, friends and associates. Greater success in your life work. More genuine intimacy and peace of mind in this troubled world!

You can have all these things in abundance—no cost! Nothing is impossible—nothing is beyond your reach—when you know how to use The Secret of The Power Within You.

Ben Sweetland, senior to millions throughout the United States as Radio's Counseling Psychologist, and who has contributed many works in the field of applied psychology—quite incidentally, discovered the "Secret Contact" between the conscious mind and the unconscious—all at all—call upon his great mental powers.

The general opinion ("I refer to the mental will, Sweetland has taught for years. When this word is added to anything it becomes an instruction to will." "The only difference between the gentleman and the madman is that the gentleman published in 1935 is that the madman is in terms of 'I CAN' and the other—'I CAN'T'—he laughs his followers to hold in the thought 'I CAN' and in a large number of cases, they proved they could—this the thought."

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Many Smith had a good singing voice but lacked the courage to use it in public. "I CAN" gave her direct contact with her source of power and she has since appeared on concert stages throughout the United States.

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on the immediate schedule. Either or both of these planets may well have enough atmosphere to support human life in comfort. This opens up direct colonization—the new vast frontier of space itself. And once this ball begins to roll, other governments will be forced to turn their eyes to the sky and forget about their neighbors' backyard. Once Man enters God's Country—upstairs—he may realize for the first time how small a mote humanity and the Earth really is, and how senseless is struggle at home when the Universe lies before Man's reaching fingers. Sure, there may be struggles for power on other worlds, but even that will appear insignificant in the face of the vastnesses open to mankind. Don't sell the space station short—it's the stepping stone not only to the stars—but to the maturity of Man himself! . . . wh

BOTT ON THE FIRE!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

After reading the SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY in the June issue I decided to ask you a favor. Would you please fire Henry Bott for me? Saying Isaac Asimov is not a writer. Indeed! I am not an Asimov fan by any means, but I see no reason to call him heavy-handed and ponderous just because his style is different. I would take him to H. G. Wells any day. Granting the ability to make instantaneous jumps from one part of the galaxy to another, his books are entirely in the realm of possibility.

In the letter section I agree with Jack Zeitz on giving a medal to the

people who work on and launch the first space ship as well as those who make the first trip into the void. But, since you also agree, I see no chance for an argument on this point!

Also in the letter section, if Gordon Pape doesn't like what you print, forget him. Too many of us do approve of Madge's contents to let Pape bother anyone.

My favorite magazines, incidentally are: IMAGINATION, first; ASTOUNDING, second; GALAXY, third; IF, fourth; and FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, fifth—which latter magazine I think is an entirely different type.

If any of your readers have not as yet joined the SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB you advertise on the back covers, I would advise them to do so. It's a darned good club!

Frank Saunders
8506 Kedvale Ave.
Skokie, Ill.

As is our policy, we do not interfere with the opinions of Madge's columnists. Henry Bott, as book reviewer, and Mari Wolf, as fan section editor, have free reign; we value both of their capabilities and judgment in handling their respective departments. Bott has a long and respectable background in science fiction—since 1935. He is a competent technical science writer with material appearing in the past in many trade magazines and in most of the leading science fiction books such as Astounding, Amazing, Fantastic Adventures, If, and Imagination, to mention a few. He was Associate Editor of AMAZING and FA for several years. He

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is currently Science Editor for the Minneapolis-Honeywell Corp. Mari Wolf has a wide background in fandom, and has written and sold science fiction stories to leading magazines in the field. Both of these staff members of Madge know their business, so we back them to the hilt. We agree with you about the book club—everybody join! . . . wth

PAGING TEENAGE FAN CLUB

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Before I begin my ritual, I would like to say that I am a teenager and a very scientific-minded one at that. If any of your other teenage readers can show me the answers to any of my questions I will be extremely grateful. Also, I shall say that I have been reading Madge for several years and I think it's the best!

Recently I was looking through some of my old copies of Madge and I ran across an item in the February 1953 issue—in FAN-DORA'S BOX—where Mari Wolf said she had received a card from Bob Kessler saying he wished to announce the formation of a stf fan club for teenagers.

In looking through issues up to date I cannot find further mention of the subject and wonder if it was dropped. If there is an active teenage stf club I would very much like to find out so I can join.

I just finished reading the June issue of Madge and I have a few comments to make. First off I think that was a real gone cover. (Say, why doesn't the artist ever

sign his name?) The Lesser novel was a real top notch piece of work.

Keep up the excellence of your editorials, cartoons, and short novels. In closing, I'd like to back Jean Courtois' letter in the June issue. I think she showed that a teenager doesn't always have his or her head up in the clouds!

Richard McDaniel
2130 E. 4th St.
Owensboro, Ky.

Madge's cover artist always receives full credit on the contents page, Dick. Glad you liked the June issue and we feel sure some fans will answer your question concerning a teenage club . . . wth

DISAGREES WITH PAPE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

We'll excuse Mr. Gordon Pape on the assumption that he must have been in an exceedingly rotten mood the day he wrote the letter in the June issue. I consider THE COSMIC JUNKMAN (December '53) especially good. Rog Phillips usually is. THE TIME ARMADA (two-part serial, Oct.-Nov. '53) well, I couldn't wait to read the second installment! NO SONS LEFT TO DIE (September '53) was real good also. I can't remember if I read PERIL OF THE STARMEN in the January '54 issue so I can't comment.

This is the first letter I've ever written like this, but I just had to take exception with Pape's slamming the above Madge stories.

I rate Madge as terrific. Keep it up. I especially like the letter section. I never read FANDORA'S

.BOX but everybody else seems to so I guess it is quite popular. Keep using covers that show a scene from the lead novel.

Naomi Hayes

R. D. 1

Monaca, Pa.

Now that you've broken the ice, Naomi, write us again . . . wkh

JUST PLAIN GREAT!

Dear Ed:

Just a few lines on your magazine, *Madge*.

I finished reading the May and June issues and don't know which one was the best! THE GIANTS FROM OUTER SPACE in May and SLAVES TO THE METAL HORDE in June were both great.

The rest of the stories were also great, as always, and of course, the various departments and cartoons.

Madge's covers are always great. I especially like the way they portray a scene from the lead story. . . . How about a space quiz? To sort of sharpen our knowledge on man's coming adventure to the stars!

W. C. Brandt

1725 N. Seminary Ave

Oakland 21, Cal.

Space quiz? Any seconds to the motion? . . . Which about winds up shop for this month. Don't forget to get your copy of the first issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES now on sale. See you next month . . . wkh

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